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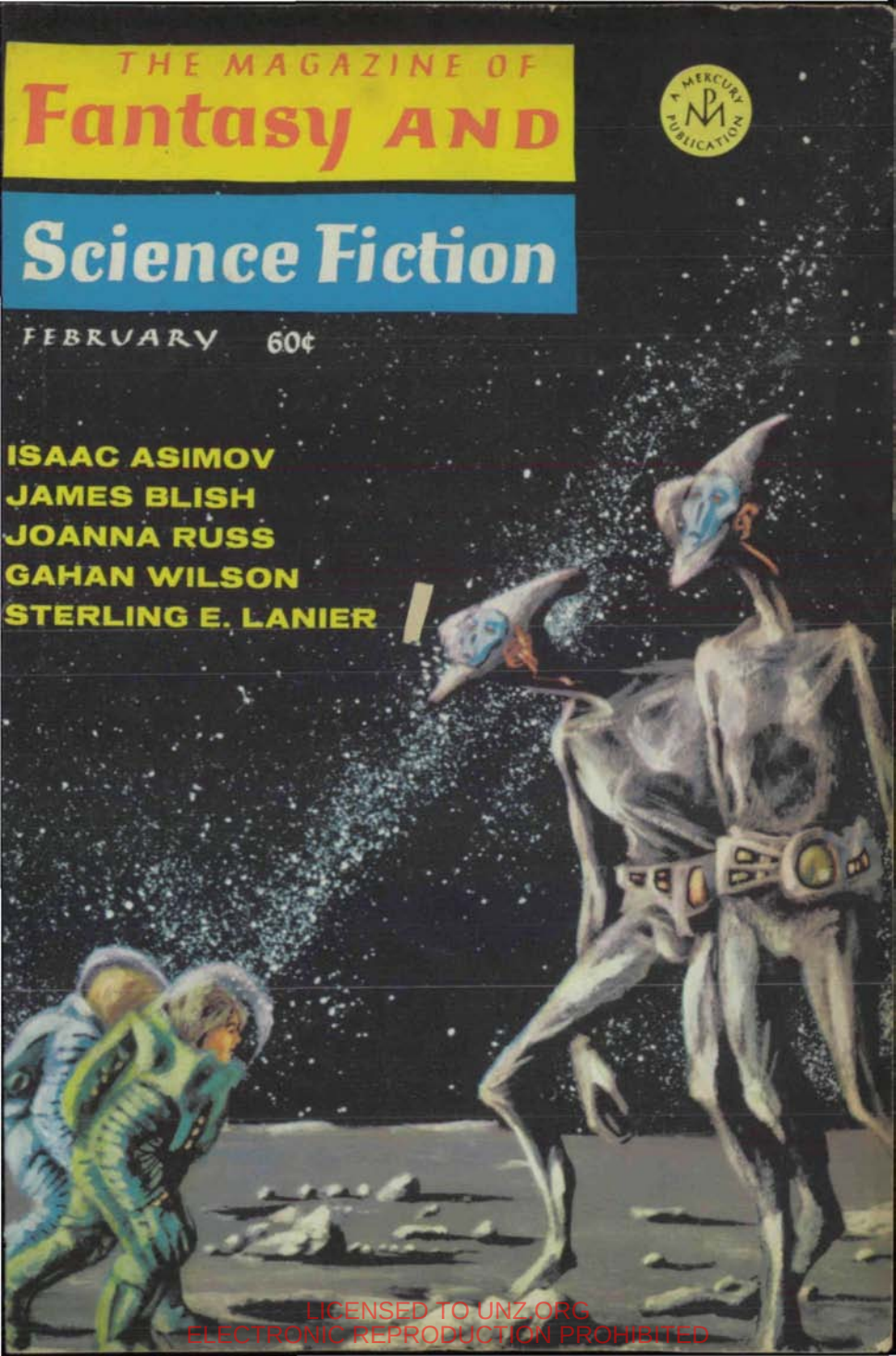

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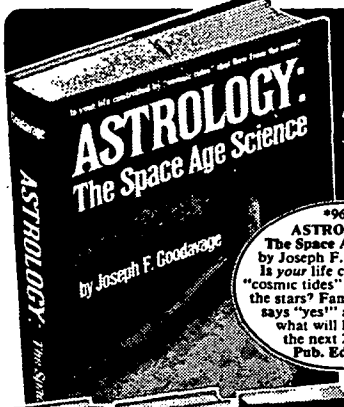

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The manuscript for the story you are about to read was brought to our office last spring by Mike Gilbert, the artist who eventually did the cover painting for it. We were favorably impressed by the story, and our feeling that more would be heard from its author has since proved accurate. (We have more of his work in our inventory, and he has also sold to a competitor.) Neil Shapiro is 21 years old, a student at the Rochester Institute of Technology; this is his first published story, a fresh and poignant treatment of a classic sf theme.

FROM THE MOON, WITH LOVE

by Neil Shapiro

1

DORN WAS HAPPY, EXTREMELY happy. Once a week Dorn was happy, and this was *that* day of the week. He danced back and forth, up and down the room, smiling and laughing at the red, green, blue, multihued, multimessaging light displays that covered the Big Board. He hummed a little tune under his breath. And a little one it was. It was like the sound of a rusted hinge, or a broken relay. Sometimes it clicked, and other times it whistled. It was atonal and, less times, it was melodious. But, it was a pretty nice accomplishment for someone that had never heard any music but his own.

Hillman sat, hunched, stood, lay, existed in the corner of the Control Room in his own special niche. Hillman was an all-purpose, chrome-plated, nearly humanoid, functional arm of the main computer banks of Fortress Desire. Hillman wasn't happy. Properly speaking, Hillman could never be anything but Hillman. But then, Hillman

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was never sad either. So, in the long run, things balanced themselves out rather neatly.

"It's the day, it's the day, it's the day!" Dorn said happily, cavorting in front of Hillman's optic sensors. Hillman didn't reply. He just sat there, or whatever you would want to call it, and allowed Dorn his weekly moment of happiness.

Hillman was only a robot, albeit a complicated, wire-snarled, relay-clicking, shiny-bright robot—and Dorn, well, Dorn was the Master of Fortress Desire.

Dorn danced to the Big Board and laughing, looked at the large oscilloscope screen that was labeled SITUATION AND DEFENSIVE DISPLAY. The screen shimmered blue and then red, and finally purple. Then it cleared to a nice green color, covered with tiny spots of yellow moving about its lighted face. And then, the bell rang.

The bell rang! This was Dorn's moment. *Bong,* or perhaps *Rinnnng,* and it was then all up to Dorn.

Dorn smiled and turned to Hillman. "Fire at will," he shouted, "the Fortress is under attack!" Each week he tried to change how he said it a bit, just to add even more fun to the happy event. That day he tried to sound sad. But, as he had never been sad, it could hardly have been called a dramatic moment. As a point of record, each week he sounded about the same, but then why spoil his fun by mentioning that? No one ever mentioned it to him. Least of all Hillman, who wasn't himself qualified to judge human vocal inflections.

And it made no difference to Hillman. Once the words were spoken, the words were spoken. He rolled from his niche to the Big Board and settled himself into the hollow provided.

Dorn clapped his hands together and leaped into the air. This was the very best part of all. As soon as he landed (two and a quarter seconds), he ran to the chair that hung suspended in front of the outside viewscreen. Quickly, he threw the tiny switch in the arm of the chair that activated the screen. Now, he could watch!

"Enemy Fortress is firing on fourth solar-cell. Request permission to defend." Hillman said to Dorn.

"Defend, then." Dorn giggled, and moved the vernier control on the other arm of the chair until the screen presented him with a perfect view of the number four solar-cell.

The solar-cell was surrounded by a hazy, purple aurora, as the beams from Fortress Hope tried to melt it into a slagged, rather useless lump.

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Hillman was right on the job. The monitor showed a beam from one of Fortress Desire's four hundred lesser cannon shower against the offending beam and attempt to overpower it.

"Defenses holding," Hillman said. "Have attempted to take the advantage militarily but, as has been the case in the past three hundred maneuvers, the two opposing Fortresses are evenly matched."

"Fight, fight!" Dorn said. His hands gripped the cushioned arms of the chair hard enough to wrinkle the tightly drawn material. His eyes were riveted to the screen as the view switched back and forth from one theatre of operations to the other.

"Kill, kill!" Dorn screamed. It should be mentioned that Dorn could be forgiven his cries. He had never seen real death, and therefore he could not be held morally responsible for wishing it upon his attacker. It has, however, been argued that Dorn had not as yet known real life either; but as the metaphysics of that particular cult verge on the arcane, no further mention shall be made of them.

Dorn, the Master of Fortress Desire, sat at his monitor and cheered on the defenses of the Fortress. A small drop of spittle formed at his chin.

Meanwhile, at Fortress Hope . . .

Lara was presently engaged in attempting to destroy the aforementioned solar-cell. Well, actually, you couldn't say that. What Lara was actually doing was changing her hair color. It was a hobby of hers, and she really couldn't see why Tuesdays should be all that different, attack or no attack.

That day she was experimenting with streaks of orange forming a sunburst pattern in a bouffant of honey-blonde. Considering the sun was something quite different to her than to us, the attempt wasn't all that bad. Of course, it wasn't all that good either.

Lara. There have been four thousand interpretations of the story of Lara; and somehow, there have been five thousand descriptions of her. However, they all agree that any male spending more than ten minutes in her presence would find his mind tending somewhat toward the finer qualities of rape. And all agree that no male could have lived through it. Lara knew where every pressure point of the body was located. And as she had never experienced pain, she had little scruples about hurting people.

This is not to say she wasn't the gentlest soul who ever filled out a dress. She was. But she had depth to her character.

It would be ridiculous even to

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attempt to go into detail on her appearance. How many artists have tried capturing her beauty in pigment? How many imprisoning her form in holograms? How many millions of living rooms are adorned with copies of John Smith's Sculpture in Forty Plastics of Our Lady Lara? Not to spoil your illusions, but she was skinny. Also, her complexion was just the tiniest bit blotchy. However, as Bratislavska had told her once, she had "the biggest set of jugs anyone could want." Also, the only set, at the time.

Bratislavska couldn't be blamed for his rather tasteless comment, he didn't mean anything by it. Bratislavska was somewhat like Hillman. He was exactly like Hillman except for his name, and that he was in Fortress Hope with Lara. While Hillman had been programmed to vocalize by a Baptist minister's son from the hills of West Virginia—Bratislavska had learned his vocabulary from a rather swarthy Lithuanian sailor, turned programmer, who had been once rumored not only to have a girl in every port but to have used quite a number of ports in every girl.

"The enemy Fortress is holding." Bratislavska's voice reached Lara from the other room.

"It's 1400 hours," Lara said contritely, "continue bombardment for another thirty minutes. Really, Brat, if we begin stopping earlier, who knows? Next year we may not fight at all."

"Yes, Lara."

Wednesday morning dawned and waned away, as it always seemed to, into Wednesday afternoon. It was movie time at Fortress Desire.

Dorn knew the movie by heart, but it was a welcome break in routine. The routine of doing nothing on five other days of the week. Of course he preferred battle-day more, but the movie was also interesting. And, every now and then, Hillman would add a bit more narration to the film. He settled back into the deep-cushioned chair and looked expectantly up at the screen in the darkened room.

"This is the Earth," Hillman's voice said from the projection room. Dorn watched as the camera panned across a star-filled void until the blue-green orb was in focus.

"These were the last photos taken by the First Master, and they have been artificially enhanced by means of animation," Hillman continued. "The continent you are now watching was called North America, or properly, the United States. Or the other way around. The records seems to be a bit scanty on that topic."

Dorn sank deeper into the cushions. This part was drab at best.

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"Three hundred and forty years ago . . ." Hillman narrated.

Dorn watched as the first light-flower blossomed out on what he had been told was the land-mass of North America.

". . . the War began . . ."

Soon the very shape of the round ball was hazy and shimmering around the edges. The lights had multiplied until the image of the Earth looked like it was about to rip in half.

". . . one minute later, it ended."

The orb now looked nearly the same as it had when the film began. Only, there was more of a cloud covering. Black clouds.

"And, like a phoenix, the War began once more!"

Dorn sat straight up. The screen showed an outside view of Fortress Desire under attack from Fortress Hope whose balustrades could be seen rising over the mountainless, airless, horizon.

"The Fortresses fought with lesser weapons, having no others. They fought for eighteen days and eighteen nights . . ."

Beams of force and solid explosive shells played over the image of Fortress Desire's outer defenses. Lasers whipped their way through the energy barrier and cascaded off the glowing, mirror-like finish of the outer armor—bounced back and dissipated themselves in streamers of horrorific color.

"And at the end of eighteen days and nights, no decision could be reached, and so a parley was arranged . . ."

A file of men and women walked from the main gates of Fortress Desire, clad in the strange suits Dorn had seen hanging in the room-where-he-had-never-left-from. Dorn watched avidly as they met the other line approaching from Fortress Hope.

"But treachery carried the end to the Fortresses of those who had died above them . . ."

The white flags dripped red, and bodies were strewn around the fallen standards, disturbing the gray dust that had lain fallow for six billion years. The fighting groups crawled over each other and made their way to the Fortress of their enemies. Each to the other's.

". . . and all died in the hatred that spread even as radioactive death spread on the world that had spawned that base emotion . . ."

The camera showed the fighting which had taken place within the very walls of Fortress Desire. And soon, it showed the death. The sound track that had been alive with the radioed screams of the near-dead and still-dying was silent.

". . . and Fortress Desire lay in ruins, all but for myself, the servant of the Master . . ."

The view now centered on a

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machine—on Hillman—struggling from the debris around him.

". . . the regulations stated that the Fortress must be manned, but there were none left to so man it. I did the only possible thing . . ."

The camera followed as Hillman went from fallen man to fallen man, a sharp surgical blade held in his metallic claw. But, where death had come cruelly, Hillman's cuttings and slashings seemed somehow gentle even to untutored Dorn.

"Forty-eight years and thirty days later I succeeded . . ."

The scene dissolved to a close-up of a man climbing from a vat of liquid, a man that could have been Dorn's twin. In truth, they were much closer than twins.

". . . from cell cultures I had taken, and after years of experimentation, regulations were fulfilled. Once again, the Fortress was manned—by the first of the true Masters."

Lara, in a room much like that Dorn sat in, was also watching a movie.

". . . from cell cultures, and from years of experimentation, and after many failures, regulations were once more fulfilled. Once again the Fortress was manned—by the first of the true Mistresses," droned Bratislavska's metallic voice.

Lara studied the close-up of the young girl that looked so much like herself. Her upper lip curled. The other girl's hair was an unimaginative brunette. Softly she stroked her own, presently, flame-red tresses.

"And then, in continuation of the battle plan," Bratislavska said, "we attacked the enemy Fortress—in order to raze it to the ground and to bring a final victory to those who had built our own Fortress and died with it so long ago. But, we were stopped . . ."

Lara yawned. The scene was familiar. It might as well have been the weekly Tuesday battle.

". . . the enemy must also have discovered the technique of cellular rebirth. There have been four true Mistresses before you, Lara, and that is how you have become what you are—the last prayer of Fortress Hope."

". . . there have been four true Masters before you, Dorn, and that is how you have become what you are—the last arm of Fortress Desire."

2

Now, most of the chronicles that relate to the story of Dorn and Lara and the Tale of the Two would skip blithely on to the following Tuesday. After all, that's when it begins, when the action starts. But, those other Tales never tell you of what made Dorn and Lara so magnificently Dorn

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and Lara, and that is a great loss. For one thing, there were the environments of Fortresses Hope and Desire. That type of environment would tend to make one cranky after a while. Also, insanely sane, more or less mad with stability.

But, they were people. That surprises you, doesn't it? They should have been more than people. They should have been just this side of the gods. Neither of them should ever have had to eliminate body waste and Lara never sweated. OK, you believe that. Keep your illusions, your delusions. Put this down, goodbye. We won't miss you, least of all Dorn and Lara.

But you others, you who are waiting to know. Stick around. You've read the introduction, now read the prelude . . .

There was the day that Dorn walked the catwalk, and nearly lost his chance to meet Lara. It was the first and nearly the last time he ever went directly outside.

One day, for no special reason, Dorn put on the spacesuit that had been hanging in the closet for a few hundred years. It would be poetic to say that first he scraped off a two centuries' layer of dust, wiped the cobwebs from the faceplate and put it on suffused with a great reverence, murmuring almost a prayer to the long-dead people who had manufactured it. However, the suit was spanking clean and its chrome parts glistened almost with as much of a sheen as Hillman's hide—thanks to the always-humming, ultrasound cleaning room the suit had been stored in.

Dorn shrugged into it, not very gracefully. It was the first time he had worn one, and he had more important things on his mind than History. Like seeing that his air tanks were full.

He was surprised with the surface outside of the Fortress. It was hard, and it crunched when he walked on it.

"Well," he said to himself, "ground really is hard and funny feeling." He was proud of himself because he had learned a totally new thing all on his own.

His voice closed the VOX relays of the suit's transmitters, and Hillman heard him walking around out there and saying strange things.

"What are you doing out *there?*" Hillman asked Dorn over the two-way radio. You could hear Hillman's gears grind as he spoke. He couldn't make his voice sound angry, but he did have ways of compensating for that.

"I'm taking a walk," Dorn said, not seeing the need to lie, and not knowing how to lie if he had.

Truth can, at times, be a

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better weapon than a lie. This truth shocked Hillman into a kind of silence. Each time he tried to talk, his gears would make such a racket that Dorn wouldn't have understood him even had he tried.

Dorn spent nearly an hour walking. He found it quite intoxicating to walk where there were no walls, or computers, or movie screens. Ashamedly, he also enjoyed the consternation he was causing Hillman.

Then, Hillman found his voice and attempted to order Dorn back in. Then he nagged and wheedled. It didn't help. Then he tried threatening.

"Dorn, you could get a micrometeorite puncture in your suit and all your air would rush out. You would suffocate and your lungs would burst. Your eyes would fall from your head and you would die. Come inside, Dorn, or I will puncture your suit with a beam from Fortress Desire, and then you will die."

Dorn ignored Hillman's threat. Not because he attributed any anthropomorphic, altruistic manifestations to Hillman, but he knew what Hillman's programming was.

"I am the Master of Fortress Desire," Dorn said, "that's right, isn't it?"

Hillman was forced to agree.

"Then, I may go where I want and do what I wish. Don't interfere Hillman, or I may let you rust."

Hillman's threats may have failed to arouse a fear-response in Dorn, but Dorn's threat worked nicely against Hillman. Try imagining yourself being slowly impaled on a pole, and then your intestines drawn out from your gut and wrapped around your neck in a hangman's noose. That's approximately how Hillman felt about rusting.

"All right," Hillman said, "you may go where you want and do what you wish, but," he added, "don't look up!"

Probably you think that Dorn immediately craned his neck back and swept the sky. Usually if you tell someone not to do something, they will automatically do it. But this was the first time Dorn had ever been warned against anything.

It was a strange feeling at first. One part of him felt it would be a supremely foolish thing to look upwards, but another part of him wanted to look more than it had ever before wanted anything. Most of him, however, watched the other two parts. He had never felt indecision, and he found it to be mysteriously interesting and painful.

He decided the only way to see if indecision was good or not was to put it to the test. The only test available was to look up. So, he did look up, but not for the

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reasons you would expect. But then, he was Dorn of Fortress Desire.

He was nearly stunned into unconsciousness.

Blue, his mind screamed.

It wasn't like the movie, the movie had been safe and flickery. But this, this, this was something else altogether. The Earth was blue!

Not just blue. But, a color all to itself. It said new things to him, it whispered secret thoughts, it laughed at him, it cried with him. It made him sad—really sad!—and filled him with drug-like visions.

It was a lot to take after being protected for twenty-three years.

"Dorn! Dorn!" Hillman's voice said at maximum volume and pitch.

Dorn tried to cover his eyes and blot out the horrible, wonderful sight. But his gloved hands just skittered around the glass of his faceplate, and he couldn't remember how to shut his eyes.

Hillman knew he had to do something, and he tried his best. And, to his credit, it worked. It's a good thing Hillman was around then.

"Look at it, Dorn." He whispered. "It's the Earth, the Earth as it really is. Isn't it beautiful? It revolves once around every twenty-four hours of our time, and it will never fall. Its circumference is 25,000 miles, and it is 6,000 miles in diameter. Now, it's a Full Earth, although it undergoes a monthly cycle of changes and . . ."

"Stop it!" Dorn ordered. He took his gloved hands from his helmet and forced himself to look directly at it. "It's none of those things," he said, "and if it is, then those are not the things which make it Earth. It's home, Hillman. And it's more. It's the reason for the name Desire, and I can sympathize with the name Hope. I will come in now, but I am glad I did not listen to your advice. I've seen the Earth and now I know what the color blue means."

"It nearly killed you," Hillman said.

"It nearly killed me." Dorn agreed. He turned back and re-entered the Fortress. Hillman locked the door to the room that held the suit, but he need not have bothered. Dorn would never have used it again. As he once said to Lara, much later, "Once is enough for any man to look upon the Earth." And he always meant what he said.

Hillman worried for a week, but finally all his medical monitorings of Dorn read normal—and he never again mentioned it to Dorn.

But, Dorn never forgot.

Lara. Lara was not a female copy of Dorn. Lara was the Mis-

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tress of Fortress Hope. Perhaps the symbolism will explain itself to you. If it doesn't, don't worry about it. You may then never understand her story, and you may giggle and chuckle lasciviously when someone mentions her name, but that's your loss. It certainly isn't Lara's.

Lara wasn't affected as strongly by her experience as Dorn was by his, but then she never saw Earth until much later—beyond the end of the story, the true end of the story. But that too will be mentioned. After all, what good is a story if it ends where you expected it would? Or, for that matter, begins too late?

Lara was always on time.

One Tuesday Lara rebelled. Not because she was unhappy with society, and not because of an inherent moral flaw in her character. And, definitely, positively, she didn't do it because she thought at all about Destiny. You may laugh, but it might have been because she was a woman.

Lara spent her Tuesdays quite differently from Dorn. Bratislavska had only once asked her for the Big Order, and she had replied to him:

"Fire at will and whenever you think it's necessary, do it again. But, please don't bother me with details."

She wasn't being flippant and she didn't see any humor in it. If you had told her that she had made herself obsolete, she would have laughed at you. Tell her anything else and she would have considered it. But there is no way you could have convinced her that she had made herself obsolete. That would have meant *used*, and she knew she wasn't that.

Bratislavska certainly didn't think that. To him, Lara wasn't something to be trifled with. That may not change your opinion, but remember that Bratislavska ran around in a beautiful chrome body connected to over one million computer inputs and outputs, via long-wave radiations.

Bratislavska maybe knew something.

It was Tuesday and the room was clicking with noise. There was the sound of the four hundred lesser cannon as they slid noisily out of their hidden niches and the shuddering thunder of their recoiling against the wall springs. There was the sound of the power plants humming away deep down under the floor, down under where Lara was forbidden to go. There were the million tiny noises of relays clicking and humming. If you listened especially hard, you could hear Bratislavska sliding about and making connections within the little cutout for him in the Big Board of Fortress Hope.

Lara didn't listen. It was all very annoying, the noise. Every Tuesday. Just once, she thought,

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she'd like to spend at least one Tuesday alone with herself, and her hair, in front of her favorite mirror. Not that she was vain, it's only that a person must amuse herself in some way. She amused herself *with* herself, that's all. Dorn shined Hillman and Lara colored her hair. She wasn't vain by any definition.

But, she *was* annoyed. All that noise! Already a magneto, whining at an inopportune moment, had caused her to slip and apply the tiniest, gossamer thread of silver to the right quadrant of the right side of her part—and she had wanted to place it on the left.

She walked into the Control Room and, putting her hands on her hips, said loudly, "That's it. It's all over. No more today. It's been fun, but it's all over now!"

For a moment, Bratislavska nearly doubted his own programming, which in itself is near to nonunderstandable.

"What?" he asked, peering out from under the Big Board, "would you repeat that please?"

"Can it!" Lara said. "Cease firing. You've been playing around for more than three hours, fifty minutes and forty-eight seconds now. Fun is fun, but you're," her voice rose, "mussing my hairdo!"

For a moment one of Bratislavska's memory cells failed him, and he struck one of his arms on the ledge around the base of the Big Board. As his gyros were righting him, he said in the most stable tones he could manage, "No, no, no, that can't be right. I thought I heard you vocalize an order to cease firing?"

"That's it. Now you've got it."

"But . . ." Bratislavska managed to pitch his voice into a very reasonable facsimile of a whine.

"Who's Mistress here?"

Who else? Bratislavska had no choice but to cease firing—and on a Tuesday!

Lara enjoyed the quiet. She dyed her hair four times, changed styles twice, and once she even injected hormones to grow a beard, which she quickly depilatoried off.

Soon though, the quiet was louder than any noise. It was misplaced quiet, it didn't belong. Not there, not then, not that way.

Lara found herself clicking her fingernails against the porcelain top of her dressing table. Then she was stamping her heel. Up and down. Click, stomp, click, stomp, click.

"I can't stand it!" she shouted, and rescinded her order. Immediately the four hundred cannon and the shields and the beams and the power were switched back on. And, relievedly, she went back to doing her hair.

But, for the first time in three hundred and forty-two years, Fortress Hope had been momentarily silent on a Tuesday.

Lara had ordered silence, and

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Dorn had seen the Earth. Remember that.

3

They came first to Fortress Desire and then, later, to Fortress Hope. Dorn and Lara received them as each would have been expected to, as they could have done no other way. But, those-who-came could not have known this, nor accepted it. Such actions being beyond their understanding, and in many ways, beneath their respect. Dorn and Lara cannot be blamed, nor praised, nor condemned for their actions. One was the Master of Desire and the other the Mistress of Hope. It was well that they were.

They circled about Fortress Desire over the shields and beyond the range of the cannons for all of two days. As Hillman described them to Dorn, it was a large, featureless ball of energy suspended above the Fortress and was approximately two miles in diameter.

After describing it, cataloguing it, and comparing it to all other data stored in the prime memory banks, Hillman was content to ignore it. Or, if not content, he wasn't programmed to do anything about, for, to, or with it; so it amounted to nearly the same thing.

Dorn, on the other hand, could not ignore it. But he too was not equipped to carry out any sort of plan against it.

It did not threaten the Fortress, it made no move to leave.

It hovered.

For two days.

On the second day they spoke in a voice tinged with a nearly human repugnance. The words they spoke were senseless to both Dorn and Hillman. The emotion was indecipherable to Dorn, and woke old memories in Hillman. The Voice came from the main speaker that vibrated with the modulations of the Forty Receivers, all receiving in unison on the forty frequencies of which none had been used in three and a half centuries.

First, the Voice asked if the Fortress was manned.

"What should I say?" Dorn asked.

"Tell them yes." Hillman said. "After all these years, these might be the builders, and if so they will be happy to see that I have enforced the regulations."

Dorn answered and his voice went on the forty frequencies.

"This is the Master of Fortress Desire. I have protected us from Fortress Hope, and never once has my servant and friend Hillman failed me. Are you the builders? If so, rejoice, for the regulations have not been broken. I have fought for twenty-one years, once a week, and have faithfully learned my History." He hesitated

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for a moment, "I am Dorn, I am the Master of Fortress Desire."

The Voice spoke again. If at first it had sounded like a man, then the illusion shattered. But, neither did it sound like Hillman.

"Are you human?" it asked.

"I . . . I don't know," Dorn said. "I have told you I am the Master; if this makes me human, I am human."

"Then, you cannot be human," the Voice said, and it seemed as if to be speaking under the weight of an infinite sadness. The tone so startled Dorn that he felt his knees bend, and he nearly fell into a crouch before the microphone.

Hillman spoke. "This is the Control-Mobile Unit of Fortress Desire. The person to whom you have spoken is human. His name is Dorn. He does not know the word 'human', as it is now useless. 'Human' denotes a being that is part of a set, one unit among many. He is the last, he is the Master. Now, leave us. You do not know the encoded words and cannot be the builders. I have computed from voice-print that the sounds you are making are not being modulated by organic mechanisms. Hence, I deem you a threat to security and will . . ."

The other's Voice boomed into the room, no longer indifferent, now a sound of rage. Dorn felt every muscle in his body quake before it.

"Silence." The Voice demanded. "You, who call yourself Master, you Dorn . . ."

"I hear you," Dorn said, even though he knew that while he was receiving them they could not hear him.

". . . whatever you have learned, whatever lies you have accepted as truth, forget them now. There is not time left. You have wasted three hundred years. Years in which we had given up all hope. Three hundred years spent traveling back and forth trying to find one other race, one other world, to take the place of the one we thought lost. The one that vanished so tragically at their own hand before contact could be established. And nowhere could we find another race of beings, another spark. Here we find you, hidden away, still trying to destroy, still trying to kill, not even knowing what you are."

"I do not understand!" Dorn pleaded, throwing the switch that would carry his words to them. "I will order you destroyed! I am the Master of Fortress Desire!"

And what of Fortress Hope? the Voice asked him, and now it was coming from within his own mind. Dorn clenched his fists and rubbed at his forehead, but still the Voice spoke to him from within himself. Louder, much louder than before.

"Nothing," Dorn screamed, "nothing! Fortress Hope is the

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enemy and holds only death. Death and white flags dripping with blood. Blood, red blood on white banners, draped over bodies fallen in the dust."

Fortress Hope contains Life, not blood. Life. Even now you must leave to seek it out. It waits for you, and you are still human.

"No, I can never leave. There is no reason, no way." Dorn sobbed and beat at the steel floor with his clenched fists.

"Hillman!" The Voice came once more from the speaker. "Have you any DNA and cell structural components of the double-X configuration?"

"No," Hillman said, "all that is and was available to me is that of the XY pattern."

"And, the others?" the Voice demanded. "Did the others have the XX pattern?"

"This is classified," Hillman said.

"Hillman, you have scanned our ship and know our powers are such that the entire energy output of the weapons at your disposal could not measure one-millionth of what we control."

"That is true."

"Then answer, or we shall level Fortress Desire."

"The enemy," Hillman said, "did have access to female cells for replication. As far as I know, there is now a female Master at Fortress Hope. But what you plan can never be, it is not in the plan and the Master would never agree."

Dorn, you must do as we ask. There is little hope, little time. You must obey us.

Dorn rose to his feet. "I follow no orders, I am the Master."

And then, they showed him Lara. For the first time in centuries one knew of the other's existence, and Dorn was not prepared. He saw her and did not understand. For a moment he thought it was his own face, as he had seen it in the mirrors before. But then the differences caught him. The nose, smaller; the eyes, bluer; the hair, golden.

"What trick is this, that you bend my features and insert them in my mind?"

It is another human, the last but for yourself. Journey across the dust plain to Fortress Hope, and meet Lara. Then you will replicate couples such as yourself and return to the place where all now are dead. That is your task —and ours.

"Who are you?"

We are the Ezkeel, *and we have failed. In a slight few centuries of unguardedness we returned to find all was lost.*

"You spoke of the place where all are dead?"

You have seen it, Dorn. And the knowledge of it nearly killed you.

"The blue," Dorn said, "home."

Yes. Meet with the other survivor. Then replicate at least four

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thousand units and return to that place.

"I can't!" Dorn said and looked at Hillman as if begging him to intercede.

"That is the truth," Hillman said, "he cannot.

"He has been too well trained. He is the Master, and only the Master. Whatever else he could have been, whatever you expected, he is not. There is no way he could bring himself to leave the Fortress again."

The Voice came again from the speaker. "That cannot be true."

"I cannot lie," Hillman replied.

"We shall see."

Hot waves of agony tore at Dorn, and he screamed incoherently. The Voice no longer was content only to speak. It tore through his mind, and he could feel each probe go deeper and deeper, until finally he slipped into unconsciousness.

"If you have harmed him," Hillman said. "I will attempt your destruction no matter how futile."

"We have not harmed him, and have no wish to. We have only verified the truth. He cannot leave. It is sad, for once his kind were brave, but he is now more Master than human."

"Leave," Hillman said.

"There is one final action we must try. Do not attempt to interfere or you will bring about both the destruction of this Fortress and of Dorn. Have you been programmed against allowing that?"

"Yes."

Hillman watched as the huge spherical ship fled off. And with his outside monitors he traced its course while tending to Dorn.

He watched the ship move over the horizon towards where Fortress Hope could be seen in the distance.

"No," he said, "even that will not work. Although it is good they try. Then, I could rest." It was strange for Hillman to speak when there was no one to hear him, and stranger for him to speak as he did.

Hillman turned all of his sensors to monitoring the ship.

He watched as it destroyed Fortress Hope. When there was nothing left but a glow, and even the rocks had cooled, he carried Dorn to the Master's cabin far underground and did not hasten to revive him.

He returned to the Control Room and waited, scanning the horizon.

He watched as the *Ezkeel's* ship sped upwards and became a tiny star lost in the company of the other thousands. Soon there were only he, Fortress Desire and Dorn —and the now cooled, once flowing metal that capped a mountain on the horizon.

For the first time in three hundred and forty years he placed all defensive controls on ultimate stand-by.

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Fortress Desire was exposed to the dust, and its Master lay unconscious within.

And Fortress Hope was destroyed.

4

At last count there were three hundred popular ballads and thousands of holographic paintings purporting to tell of Lara and the Trek—of her struggles in crossing the dust plain. So far, all of them have been wrong.

Bratislavska was alone in the Control Room of Fortress Hope when the *Ezkeel* arrived.

"Evacuate," said the Voice, "we are the *Ezkeel,* they who were first and feared they were last. There is one way open to us that we must take; we must destroy Fortress Hope. Evacuate!"

While Bratislavska was as surprised as his chromium synapses could allow him to be, he was dubious. For two days he had been monitoring the ship.

"You are weak," he said, "and we have nothing to fear from you. Fortress Desire has driven you away, you can hold little threat to Fortress Hope. Desire is programmed to defend, but here you face offensive weapons. Leave, or I will unleash the total energies of Fortress Hope."

"Fortress Desire did not, as you say, drive us away," the Voice replied coldly, "on the contrary. They could not serve our ends. And now, those ends require us to destroy this Fortress."

"We shall serve no purpose of yours," Bratislavska told them. "For three centuries and near a half, this Fortress has had its own purpose, and it is not one we shall lightly abandon. I give you an ultimatum—leave or be killed."

The Voice, transmitted from the huge energy ship, once more took on the tones of disgust. "Machine!" it said, "it is not you who must decide, but your Mistress. Summon her and tell her that either destiny or death waits for her. Whichever she may choose. Do so now, Machine, for the *Ezkeel* tire of speaking to animated metals; the last was no better, and his Master little more. But, we still hope that this Fortress may hold the key."

"You request human contact?" Bratislavska asked.

"Yes."

"Then, that is an action I am programmed for." He then summoned Lara to the Big Board. The Mistress of the doomed Fortress rubbed the sleep from her eyes and reported to her slave.

Child? the Voice came to her mind, but to Lara it was soft, not commanding. It held tones of respect and perhaps of reverence.

"I hear you," she said. "And, more, I can feel the thoughts behind your words. You are . . . I

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cannot tell what you are, but the word 'Guardians' comes to mind. But, you will ask of me something I cannot do, though something I must." Like Dorn, she sank to her knees in front of the control panel and held her hands to the sides of her head. "No," she pleaded, "do not ask me to do *that*!"

"Lara?" Bratislavska asked, "are they even now attacking us?"

"Quiet! No machine may infringe on this." The Voice said through the speaker.

You must do what we ask, Lara. It would be better if we did not have to force you.

"Then you must force me, there is no way I can do willingly what you ask."

We see in your mind this truth. In many ways you are like one you have yet to meet.

"Bratislavska," the Voice again came from the speaker, "begin your evacuation at once. Take your Mistress to safety."

"We will not leave. I have received no orders to do so and have not been programmed to follow your instructions."

"Bratislavska," Lara said, her eyes distant, "they have been in my mind and I have been in theirs. I do not understand all that I have seen there, but they are Guardians. It is a fact that very soon Fortress Hope will no longer be standing. We must not delay." Then, in a firm tone, she added, "I am the Mistress of Fortress Hope and order you to evacuate. We are facing weapons we can not defend against, and defenses we can not pierce. The Fortress is doomed, and yet, somehow I feel we are not facing an enemy. Still, we must evacuate. I order it."

Travel safely, Lara, to the only place you have to go.

Thus, Lara, accompanied only by Bratislavska left Fortress Hope, and for the first time in centuries the Fortress stood empty and alone. Lara turned from the ship hovering over the Fortress and, frightened, looked out over the dust plains.

Only Bratislavska, of the two, saw the end of Fortress Hope and he was not equipped to mourn.

"What are your orders?" Bratislavska asked Lara. But, Lara could not hear him, she had looked upwards and had seen the Earth.

As it had affected Dorn it began to affect Lara. But remember that Lara had once asked for quiet. Keep in mind the time she had called off the Tuesday battle—the day the guns were silent.

And still, her sanity left her for a time.

The Earth reflected off of Lara's faceplate, and behind the glass her eyes reflected the same. Her eyes were wide and staring, and for a time she mumbled incoherent words and phrases that Bratis-

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lavska took to be mere nonsense.

Take care. Seek your safety. Look no longer on your home. Your mind is not strong enough, but there will be others you can teach.

The words comforted her and she turned back to look on Fortress Hope. But only blank craters and destruction met her gaze. For an instant her hand strayed to the chest-plate of the suit as if to let in the death that lay outside.

Do not look back. Look to the East. We are the Ezkeel, *and we know your time is soon, when you will understand all . . .*

Lara turned to the East and saw the shining, shimmering shield that clung to the high towers of Fortress Desire, and no more did she look on the Earth. Not as in the paintings or in the songs did she stand straight and smiling upwards. Such are the truths of History, not the bathos of legend.

"We go to Fortress Desire," she said to Bratislavska, and turned, and began walking towards it, keeping her stride steady and knowing that even without the Fortress she was still the Mistress of Hope.

"I see," Bratislavska said, "that your wish is to carry the war directly to the enemy's gates. That is a well-thought notion, though I fear we will have little chance to avenge Fortress Hope in anything but a token gesture. We will die as soon as we reach its outer defenses. But it is well you wish to continue our efforts. On then to Fortress Desire."

"I will not go to Fortress Desire to bring that also crashing down. The *Ezkeel* told me to seek my safety, and I do not believe safety is found by indulging in hostile acts."

"But who are the *Ezkeel*? It could be only a word, meant to confuse us—to make us think we do not know our enemy."

"We go there in peace, Bratislavska, though perhaps it would be best to ask for death. Yet, I do not wish to die."

In the silence that followed her remarks she stood and looked long on the glass-like shield of force that surrounded Fortress Desire off in the distance.

"Come, Bratislavska. There is yet one thing I must do. I do not know what, but I think I shall find it at the place named Desire."

The Long Trek. Its story alone could fill a separate volume, and as such it would be impossible to tell—but, worse, it would be useless. In fact, as Lara finished the Trek under the drug of Deep Sleep, carried in the arms of her servant and overseer, she herself could not remember the story.

So it was that Lara came to the outer defenses of Fortress Desire. Unconscious, and held in the outstretched arms of Bratislavska as

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a human sacrifice offered to an ancient god.

5

It was Thursday at Fortress Desire and Dorn was confused. Each day he could recall he had known what the next would bring. But now?

Now, with the destruction of Fortress Hope, he had no idea what to expect. He dreaded Tuesday. Would there still be a battle or wouldn't there be? There must be, he thought, it had always been so, it would always be so.

Still, without Fortress Hope, who would there be to attack him?

Under his confusion was fear.

He sat at the Big Board, for the first time taking a personal interest in the displays showing the outer defenses of the Fortress. It was his hands that were at the controls. Not Hillman's.

He feared that soon *they* would attempt to destroy Fortress Desire as they had already leveled Hope.

Hillman had been standing next to Dorn since early the day before, when Dorn had first ordered him away from the controls. It would not be right to say that Hillman was also worried, or that he felt uneasy. As mentioned, Hillman was not capable of such emotions. However, he was responsive to change, and there had been many changes made.

"Hillman!" Dorn said, "our outer defenses are being approached."

"Yes, Dorn." Hillman inserted himself into his supplementary control niche. "I will reinforce the shield. Permission to arm the Five Hundred Passive Defenses?"

"Granted." Dorn said, and set the monitors to give him an outside view of the Fortress.

"Dorn, our outer shield has been breached at point IL-8. Request permission to destroy encroaching objects."

"Put point IL-8 on the screen, Hillman."

The screen above Dorn's head cleared to show a view of Lara and Bratislavska outside the main shields of the Fortress.

"Hillman," Dorn said, "lower the shield."

Hillman's voice showed as much amazement as it was possible to do. For him to show any at all was unusual.

"Dorn, I have misunderstood your order. I shall recompense and fire the first twenty of the four hundred lesser cannon . . ."

"No! Lower the shield."

"Lara?" Bratislavska whispered.

"What?" she asked groggily, stirring in his cold arms.

"I require human guidance. They have lowered the main shields. It does not appear that we shall be terminated at once."

Seeing that Lara was now fully

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conscious, he lowered her gently to her feet.

"What are your orders?" he asked.

"For lack of anything better, I would suggest that we walk across the catwalk to the entranceway."

"They are now at the main entrance, Dorn. I could still train nearly one-third of our defenses on them."

"Open the entrance!"

"I submit that this course of action is both infeasible and endangers the Fortress . . . Where are you going?"

"To meet them. Open the entrance."

The first meeting of Dorn and Lara. It was a strange, wonderful, frightening thing. What it was not, is what everyone now believes it was. Lara did not fall into Dorn's arms while Hillman and Bratislavska watched. Neither did Dorn smile on greeting her. Nothing that has ever before been written, painted, or sung of that meeting is true. What they did, was to watch each other.

Finally, they spoke and exchanged names. But neither yet truly knew the other.

Dorn did what he had been trained to do, he followed Hillman's advice. To have acted on his own *once* was surprising enough.

"I suggest," Hillman said, "that we imprison the capitve to prevent any acts of sabotage. I further suggest we dismantle the enemy's Control-Mobile Unit."

And so, Dorn sent Lara to the Low Regions of Fortress Desire. But he did not destroy Bratislavska, only rendered him inoperative. Put to temporary sleep, as it were.

But he thought he should take no chances with Lara. He knew he could deal with the machine, but she was a human. And he had never dealt with one of those.

Little has been written about the Low Regions of Fortress Desire, or of the time that Lara spent there. It was a shameful time, an awkward time, in a period that should have been crystal clear. We know from reconstructions that the Low Regions were not a pleasant place, but then neither were they a place of horror or torture.

The Low Regions were nothing.

They contained nothing but the sound of the reactors and power plants, chugging from behind the massive walls. Soft sound.

There was nothing to do, only to listen and wait.

After a time, a person left down there long enough would come to feel that he, himself—or herself—was nothing.

Hallucinations could come after the first two weeks. Alone.

It would not be unusual for a person to have died in those surroundings.

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Picture a six by ten by twelve cubicle. All the necessities of life. Equipment for taking care of bodily functions. Dispensaries of food and drugs. All the necessities of existence, but none of the ones needed to sustain a life.

Lara had once ordered quiet, and then had reneged.

Now, she could hear her heart beat, and listen to her blood rush through the arteries in her neck. She could watch her hair grow longer day by day. That was the hardest part. Soon her hair, which was once all that had kept her sane, was unkempt and stringy.

Many nights and days she spent crying to enjoy the sounds her weeping body would make.

For a while she kept track of the days by scraping tiny cuts into her arms with a buckle she tore from off the front of her blouse. Soon, she realized the first cuts had already healed while she was still scratching more. She stopped that, then.

The meals came and she ate them. She eliminated bodily wastes, and ate again. She listened to the pumps and the motors until her ears were swollen from being pressed against the hard metal walls.

She made up little songs, but every time she sang them the melody would slow and repeat until it was in perfect time with the beating of her heart—and the flowing of her blood.

Soon, she nearly forgot her name. She would wake nameless and remember at night; she spent hour after hour repeating her name over and over to herself. It became the most important thing in the Universe to her, even more important than thoughts of escape. For, what good would be an escape if she no longer knew who she was?

There was only one thing that was as important.

One thing to keep her sane.

She would kill Dorn.

Every now and again she would repeat *his* name, in a little sing-song voice. The fact that his name kept to the rhythm of her heart bothered her not at all.

Can you picture her, looking more like an animal than a woman? If you can, you do not know Lara. She never lost her beauty.

In itself, hatred may be beautiful.

Lara was very beautiful.

The day came that the door opened. The sounds of the lock opening and the hinges creaking awoke her.

There was a silhouette in the light from the door.

"Lara," it said, "I've come to talk. Your name *is* Lara, isn't it?" A questioning voice, an unsure voice, a hated voice.

"Come in," she said. "We will talk of many things. You may listen to my heart with me, if you'd

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like. Later, we will crouch down. Here, here, next to the wall and you may hear my favorite sounds. And, later, I shall kill you. I will take my fingers and with the nails, that have grown so very long, I will scratch your eyes from your head and rip down deep into your brain. Yes, my name is Lara."

"You may not kill me," Dorn said, "for I am the Master of Fortress Desire. There are many things that Hillman says I may not allow you to do, and killing me is one of them. Hillman functions well, he told me you would say this. It pleases me to see that you are well."

"I am not well," Lara said. "I know that there is something wrong with my mind. But, I do not care. Only, come closer and please do not fight me. I am very weak. I have not eaten for many time periods. I thought that would be one way to break the monotony, and I think it has worked. At least, I no longer care."

"Lara, I too think that there is something wrong. Lately, I have thought long about you being down here in the Low Regions, and it has been unsettling to my own mind. Hillman will not explain this to me. Neither will he tell me who the *Ezkeel* were. Do you know?"

"I thought I did but it was only a feeling they gave me. Nothing with words to it." She rose to her knees and looked imploringly at Dorn, "Have you harmed Bratislavska?"

"No," Dorn said, "only disabled him temporarily."

"That is good, Dorn. If you had, I would have hurt you very badly before I kill you. You can be hurt, can't you? I can, I know."

"Yes, I can be hurt," Dorn said. "But I did not know that you could be also. I thought I was the only one who could feel pain. It may be good that you can too. I have made a decision."

"What?" Lara's voice rasped.

"I will find out who the *Ezkeel* are. Between us, we may be able to find this out. Will you help me?"

"I have also wondered on that. And I will help you. But afterwards, Dorn, I shall kill you."

"All right," Dorn replied, "thank you for helping. But I should tell you that I am not so equipped mentally as to allow you to kill me."

"That too is all right," Lara said. "I will find a way."

6

"Golden-haired, fearful of dawn,
Far-reaching woman of Hope,
Knife blades, sharpened and silver,
Moonlight, outlines his throat."
. . . From "The Song of Lara"
Authorized Version

On the second day after the release of Lara, and two decades before the reactivation of Brati-

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slavska, Dorn suggested to Lara that they should visit the Place of Ultimate Truth; that place which Hillman would only refer to as the Hall of Maudlin Propaganda.

"It would not be wise for you two to travel there," Hillman told them. "The trip itself is not dangerous, as it follows the paths of the now ruined Ways underneath the dust, you will both be protected from the sight of the Earth; though why that sight should affect both of you so pathologically I cannot scan. However, I would estimate that your chances of receiving any useful information, or any information at all, are very close to ultimate null."

But then, Hillman, at best, was always a pessimist. It's likely that if he had been the guiding force in the Destiny of the Two, that nothing at all would have happened. Indeed, the story might not have been written.

But, Hillman had taught Dorn one thing: that he was the servant and Dorn the Master. It is well that the function had once been embedded so deeply in the shiny, wiry pathways of his brain.

"We will go there," Dorn told him, "because I want data that I do not have, that you do not have, and that Lara does not have. We will go there because I am Master of Fortress Desire and it is my wish to do so."

"Very well," Hillman said. "However, it would seem useless to even speculate on who the *Ezkeel* are. At any rate, they will likely never return. And, as they have destroyed Fortress Hope, thereby finishing what could have taken us more centuries to do, I see no reason to question them."

"However," Lara told him pityingly, "you are not human. You may never understand our motives."

"True," Hillman admitted, "but then neither of you are human either."

"But, we're learning," Dorn said.

So they began their journey to the Place of Pseudo-Truths. As Hillman had assured them it would be, it was both uneventful and short. They left the Low Regions of Fortress Desire by means of a rail-car which Hillman had specially refurbished. After passing through subterranean passages at the unheard of speeds of eighty to ninety miles an hour, they arrived within twenty minutes.

They disembarked from the car and climbed the old, worn steps that led to the door. Over the door was a legend engraved on a huge bronze plate swinging free in the air currents. (The Ways being fully pressurized.)

The legend read simply:

RAND CORPORATION
LUNAR DIVISION

On the wall, near the door, were scrawled such messages as

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"Kilroy died here," and "Abandon all Desire ye who enter."

They entered.

"This is the place we will find our answers," Dorn said softly.

Lara looked at him and shrugged demurely. "That, or lose our questions. Either would leave us in a better position."

They came to the room of the Oracle. The room was cluttered with desks and yellowed papers, a fine patina of silver dust covered everything to a depth of two inches.

In the far wall was set what appeared to Dorn to be a ventilator outlet, although it was covered over with a porous cloth-like material.

In all, it was a rather disappointing sight. They had expected much better.

They were about to leave when Dorn spoke. What he said has since become indecipherable, but it is safe to assume it to have been a mystical incantation he had learned from Hillman. Dorn once remarked that Hillman had once spent forty days teaching him outmoded, useless and meaningless colloquialisms to be used in unexpected circumstances when light conversation might be called for.

"Well, three strikes and we're out," Dorn said.

Lara's reply has been lost to us.

"No, no, no! That's wrong!" a voice said. It was a voice even more mechanical than Hillman's, which is to say that it was so expressionless that it seemed filled with a pent-up emotion.

"Second strike and *they're* out." It continued, "Second strike capability, that's the plan."

"Who's there!" Dorn yelled.

Lara was spared the embarrassment of admitting her own ignorance as the voice suddenly clarified the situation.

"You have come from Fortress Desire. This makes you my first clients in over three centuries. I assume, sir, that you are the ranking civilian Executive Officer of the staff?"

"Why, I suppose so," Dorn said. "I am the Master of Fortress Desire, and as Lara is not within my chain of command, I would assume that . . ."

"You're qualified," the voice assured him. Dorn finally noticed that the sound was coming from what he had thought to be a ventilator. "Well, what's the problem? It will be good to work on a problem again. Adding new data banks to yourself is an interesting hobby, but it'll never replace problem solving. I'll admit I was rather thrilled one hundred point eight years ago when I reached a conscious-entity level—but since then it's been all rather downhill."

Dorn told the Oracle of the *Ezkeel.*

"Oh, them. Ah, yes. They were the ones who reprogrammed me

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just about a year ago. Very nice people, really. Of course they pulled duplicates from my memory storage units of everything that had been indexed 'Top Secret,' 'Highly Secret,' 'Low Secret,' and 'Sort of Confidential.' I tried to stop them, but for some reason the Security Forces never answered the automatic alarm system. Very shoddy, really, very shoddy."

"But who *are* they?" Dorn insisted.

"Oh, well . . . they are the Searchers, and the Lost. They have spent nine millennia looking for you, and now they are sorry they found you. It should, however, be noted that they are not vindictive about finding you. On the contrary. They are a bit pessimistic about the final outcome, but they wish you well. Frankly, they are of such a peculiar psychology that I doubt they could feel any other way."

"That, regardless of what you may think, doesn't help us all that much." Lara squatted on the floor between two of the cleaner desks and continued, "To repeat; who *are* they?"

"Don't confuse the issue," Dorn said.

"That in itself," the voice of RAND said, "is a basic scenario you will need to understand. Of course, I am not the type to answer metaphysical questions in a cold and logical manner. Besides, after all these years alone, I am myself no longer completely cold and logical. Therefore, I may be able to help you."

There was silence for a few infinitely long moments, and then the computer began to chant:

"Hate, hate, hate,
Find what you have lost,
If you seek it,
You'll not know it,
Find it within yourselves."

"That does sound nice," Lara said, "but you really haven't answered my question. In truth, you've added a few of your own."

"I haven't as yet finished. Now that I have defined your problem collectively, I will take you individually. First, Lara.

Golden-haired, fearful of dawn,
Far-reaching woman of Hope,
Knife blades, sharpened and silver,
Moonlight, outlines his throat.

Blood soaked banners of white,
Haunting your dreams, like dust,
Rainbow slices of fantasy,
Escape in the dawn of light.

Death and the Hunter are one,
Close in a bloodless tie,
Victory goes by another name,
You'll not see it, if you try.

Wrap yourself around yourself,
A mirror image, upside down,
Reflections broken like Hope,
Your image stands nearby.

Find not your heart's desire,
But, search for the only way out.

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"Somehow," Lara said thoughtfully, "that almost makes sense to me. However," she added slowly, "I am not at all sure that I like it."

"It makes no sense to me!" Dorn said vehemently. "Hillman was right, we shall not find our answers here."

"Do not be hasty," the computer warned him. "The only way I can answer your questions is by illogic. You must *feel* the solution yourself, otherwise the answer may be worse than the question. Now, Dorn, pay attention, I will not repeat myself. Here is the answer to Lara's question, which in turn is implicit within your own.

Empty-hollow, prey of Night,
Overbearing boy of Desire,
Blood pools viscous and crimson,
Moonlight, threatens your sight.

Hunter with nothing to hunt,
Actor with nothing to play,
The stage is almost set now,
Only a curtain bars your way.

Blue sphere, Earth,
Calls in a dire tone,
Terror of wisdom forces you,
To grasp knowledge that you have known.

Having the Way, within your reach,
You have no need of a map,
Open the heart, that lies like lead,
Dust your landmarks clean.

Find never your hidden fears,
Search for the only way out.

I think that covers both of you," the computer finished.

"No!" Dorn said. "That answers nothing. Who are the *Ezkeel*, and what do they want? What should I do, and why should I do it?"

"For that matter, who are *we*?" Lara said.

"I have given you all of your answers. I will add only that the *Ezkeel* are the reason, or the catalyst, that will cause you both to be what you will be. I see now they were right to combine you two. At first I doubted their wisdom, but I see the proof now."

"Why?" Dorn asked.

"Because you came *here*. If they had been wrong, then you both would not be here now. There is still something in you that can possibly be nurtured to a full maturity. And now, I have served my last client."

The computer was silent, and never spoke again.

As they left, Lara said to Dorn thoughtfully, "I think he was right. We probably do have all our answers now, we just can't recognize them."

"I expected more," Dorn said.

"We haven't yet found out what the *Ezkeel* are, have we?" Lara asked him.

"No."

"Then, as per our agreement, I will not as yet attempt to kill you. Besides, strangely enough, that no longer seems quite as important to me as it once did. 'Hunter with

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nothing to hunt' and 'Your image stands nearby.' There is meaning in those two lines. Somehow they have made me think that to kill you would not be right."

For the first time in three hundred years a human event intruded upon the Universe. Lara began to cry. She placed her head on Dorn's shoulder; he could feel her long hair brushing at his cheek, and the wetness of her tears soaking through his tunic. He placed his arms loosely around her waist, and leaned closer to her.

"I am sorry," he said. "I am sorry that I once gave you cause to hate me. It is strange that I should care about that, as I am the Master of Fortress Desire. But the words also held some sort of meaning for myself. Now, I find that I regret having hurt you, and this one discovery causes me an undefinable pain that I am not familiar with."

"I think I may be suffering from the same malady," Lara said, her voice slurring through her sobbing.

"We will return to Fortress Desire," Dorn said. "We will investigate and question until we have all the answers we need."

And he pulled Lara closer to him still.

The *Ezkeel* watched with pleasure. The first time they had experienced that emotion in three hundred years.

7

"Once they asked me if I was human," Dorn said.

"What did you tell them?" Lara asked.

"That I wasn't sure."

"Are you sure now?"

"If they should ask me again, I don't know what I would answer."

Already, Dorn and Lara had spent long hours attempting to decipher the message they felt sure was hidden in the bits of doggerel that they had received from the computer in the Ways.

They had all but given up. As a matter of fact, Lara had given up. Lara was beautiful, easy to talk with, had a lot of charisma, and all in all was about what you would have expected her to be. But, she didn't have a terribly long attention span.

However, she was perfectly willing to do anything Dorn wanted. More than willing, eager. All her life she had been looking for someone like Dorn, a person who wasn't metal and *told* her what to do.

Of course, she didn't know this and occasionally she and Dorn would have violent disagreements. But, on the whole, she was probably happier than if Fortress Hope had never been destroyed.

Who could blame her for not being too anxious to find out exactly why Fortress Hope had been

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destroyed? Following a good wind to its source usually leads only to a crevice between two cliffs.

She had more important things to worry about. Such as, who she was, and who Dorn was. Next to those, Fortress Hope and the *Ezkeel* didn't amount to much.

"Wrap yourself around yourself/A mirror image, upside down/Reflections, broken like crystal Hope/Your image stands nearby."

"What?" Dorn asked Lara who was mumbling the words.

"Wrap yourself around yourself," Lara repeated louder. "How can that be?"

"I don't know, but Hillman might."

Remember that Dorn had been conditioned since early childhood to the idea that no puzzle was too complex not to fall into its component parts before Hillman's metallic gaze. Conditioned? Not exactly, it was more like recognizing the truth. After all, Dorn was the Master of Fortress Desire—with all the connotations of naivete that conveys.

"Wrap yourself around yourself?" Hillman said. "This is something I cannot understand. I have not been programmed to think in metaphor. However, I would recommend you to the Library. I will add, though, that in my estimation, it is useless to try to understand any of the information you received from the Oracle." Hillman could be excused his pessimism. He had not been built to understand the poetic meanderings the Two had received. He also doubted that they were built to understand it themselves.

The Library was kept in the down-most level of Fortress Desire. It had not been entered since the time of the fallen white flags.

Dorn questioned the Library's reference file for any information, or device that might lead to deciphering the metaphor of "Wrap yourself around yourself."

"Do you think we will find even one answer here?" Lara asked.

Dorn turned from the microphone-input and looked at her thoughtfully before answering. His words were punctuated by the soft, clicking sounds of the Library electronically reading through millions of references. "I feel," he said, "that we already have our entire answer about ready to be found. The Place of Ultimate Truth pointed out to us our actual question. First, we asked who the *Ezkeel* are, and it answered us with another question. Who are we? This may be something we will have to know before we can ask about anything else. And, Lara, I think that perhaps you realized this before I did."

"While I was imprisoned," Lara said, "I wondered many

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times who I was. It was all that kept me alive. Of course I no longer hold that against you, Dorn. Then, you were only the Master of Fortress Desire, I sense that now you may be something more."

Dorn held both of Lara's slim hands in his own. "And you," he began, but he was interrupted by the blinking of the lights above the Library reference bank, and the soft, sibilant whisper of an aged recording.

"After scanning for references, and after encompassing all that had bearing, this Library has uncovered a solution to your problem."

"What?" Dorn asked.

"There, on the materials-output scale."

Dorn lifted the vial of liquid from off of the indicated scale. Inside, the solution was still sloshing about after being chuted out from the innards of Fortress Desire's Research and Development machinery.

"This?" he asked.

"Wrap yourself around yourself," the Library said, and then shut itself off.

Dorn held the vial to the light. It contained a clear fluid that sparkled like water, but gleamed with an oily luster.

Lara moved to his side and she too gazed into the liquid.

"What do we do with it?" she asked.

"I would imagine that we drink it. It cannot be a poisonous substance, or the Librarys' programming would have forced it to have warned me."

He began to unscrew the top of the vial, but Lara wrenched it from his hands and said, "It is my place to do this thing. My riddle, my question, and now my answer."

"It is your right," Dorn said, and watched as she drank the contents.

Some stories say that the liquid was a powerful drug of the ancients, some go as far as to say LSD, others contend it was only the more usual peyote. But no one knows for certain. It could have been one of those mysterious drugs or neither. But it was powerful enough. Then again, for a slim, frail young girl who had never before had a stimulant of any kind, who had always breathed nothing but the purest of atmospheres, who had been cared for all her life—a weak wine might have been enough to fulfill all that the story requires. Symbolically, a wine would be the best choice. Let's assume it was wine. And not wine synthesized by the Library, but we'll assume it to have been the last of the wines that had been made long ago, from the grapes of Earth. Now, that's symbolism.

It was good wine.

"I am flying." Lara said. She weaved back and forth across the

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room. She smiled and flailed her arms about herself.

"You are walking," Dorn corrected her.

"I am doing more than that. Wrapping myself about myself, and the mirror has turned its reflections wrong side down.. Wonderful mirror, glorious mirror."

Dorn discarded her statements as meaningless. But he was worried. He was worried about Lara. He had never been worried for or about anything or anybody before. The experience hit him hard.

"I think you should sit down," he said.

"If I sit," Lara said seriously, "I will no longer be able to fly, and it is a wonderful sensation. Look, Dorn, look!" She spread her arms wide over her head and shook her hair until her long tresses flowed over all the curves of her body. "The wings, Dorn, the wings!"

"Lara," Dorn cautioned, "your voice is slurring and your actions are incomprehensible. You are showing a reaction to whatever that was you drank. Obvously, this experiment too has failed. You should sleep now." Gently, he attempted to guide her to a chair in the center of the room.

"No!" she said, eluding him, "This is the way!" tripping over a cable on the floor, she fell. Her head hit up against the main Library Console, and blood welled up into the gash that the sharp edge had torn in her forehead.

Red was everywhere.

"Why?" he asked Hillman for what must have been the hundredth time since the accident occurred, two days previously.

"The Library, I fear, misconstrued your questions. I'm sorry, but there was no reason to suspect that the Library was out of repair. I gave it a routine inspection only twenty years ago."

"But that drink! What could it have been?"

"I do not know, Dorn. It could have been any one of many things —but it was not the worst of what it could have been. Whatever, it was a machine's answer to a human need of self-knowledge. Once, long ago, such things were popular—and still might be if there were any others left but you and Lara."

"Hillman, I must know. Why did I act the way I did? I had none of the potion."

"That, Dorn, is something you will have to answer for yourself. For both of you. I do not have the necessary data to . . ." Hillman stopped and went completely rigid for half a second, as he sometimes did when one of his computer banks contacted him on an emergency frequency.

Dorn's tone was that of a man expecting to hear his own death sentence. "What is it?" he asked.

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"You may see her now."

A light-colored service blanket from the Fortress Hospital covered her on the bed. A smile crossed her face as Dorn entered her room.

"I have one . . . no, I have many of the answers," she said.

Dorn walked to her bedside and knelt. The better to talk with her.

"Then the last experiment was a success after all?"

"No," Lara said, "but its failure caused a junction of questions that met to form an answer."

"I still do not understand you, are you sure the drug . . ."

"Hillman messaged me that you have waited outside that door for two days and nights. That you have not eaten, have not slept."

"Yes, I . . ."

"Do not talk yet, Dorn. When I awoke, my first thought was of you. Hillman told me you were outside and would come to me shortly. But, even before you arrived, some of the answers had come to me."

"What are they?" asked Dorn, then, "No. If the questions have done all this then the answers must destroy us."

"Hillman told me that I nearly died," Lara said.

"You nearly died," Dorn said and found he could no longer control his voice.

"Wrap yourself around yourself." Lara reached her hand to his.

"I am yours."

"I am you."

"You are me."

"My image stands nearby," Lara whispered.

"I have the way," Dorn said, "and I have no need of a map."

"I have lost my heart's desire and found that it was a wrong, wrong thing. I have taken the only way out."

And so Dorn and Lara answered the first and most troublesome of their questions, and were lacking only in the final summation.

And that too was coming to them.

Even then it waited for the proper moment to descend.

8

It is the Time.

Three hundred years of searching and three hundred years of hopelessness—over.

Culmination of the Plan.

Success.

Rejoice.

Success.

The echoes whispered to each other and bounced back, redoubled. The *Ezkeel* had been watching, and their watch was fruitful.

The tidings were messaged to Galactic Center and to the Eight Ragged Edges of Time; soon that entire race knew that after countless eons, one scout ship had reported back. Countless eons, to

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any other race, but the *Ezkeel* were nothing if not patient.

Now we can die. The reply came forth.

Rest, peace.

It has come full cycle.

But the scout ship cautioned them. Silently, swiftly and hurriedly.

It is not yet time.

Soon.

Not yet.

Across the stars, from every star, came the myriad replies. As one voice.

Waiting has been long.

We can wait yet longer.

Only—hurry.

Softly chiding messages flew from the scout ship, if it could be called a scout ship. A ball of energy. A zone of collapsed nothing. But a vehicle built for a Purpose.

This may not be hurried.

We have full jurisdiction.

We must give them a year.

Back, in a tone of shocked disappointment, surrounded by an emotional void.

A year?

Reiteration.

A year.

Wait only one more year.

Then, we may sleep.

Weary voices speaking with no sounds.

Success? You messaged success?

Stern emotions in a nothing way.

Success.

Yes.

But we must wait one more moment.

A consensus of celestial opinions.

Then, wait. If we must.

Luck to you, to all of us.

It is hard to continue.

We have reached our Time.

This you know: there is nothing *left.*

There was no emotion. No nodding of heads, no shaking of hands. An agreement was reached.

We know there is nothing.

Termination will be soon.

First, the waiting.

In a year, success.

Success.

No words came to Fortress Desire. No emotion, no sound, no feeling, no horror, was transmitted to either Dorn nor Lara. Only the *Ezkeel* heard and spoke. This was theirs alone.

Success.

9

A year, then. It has since come to be known as the Year of Waiting, or the Year of Suppressed Wishing. Neither of these names are truly correct.

For Dorn and Lara, the year was definitely not one of waiting, nor one in which any wishes of theirs were suppressed. But, it *was* a year that seemed somehow empty. Worse than empty.

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Emptiness they could have accepted. But instinctively knowing that something—some unknown eluded them, Dorn and Lara could not accept their new lives. In time, they no longer truly accepted themselves. And that was worse than things had been before.

"There is nothing left," Dorn said. He was turned so that only his back was facing Lara. He was looking into the viewscreen and idly playing with the controls, switching the view back and forth.

"There is everything left to us," Lara said, but her voice betrayed her disbelief.

Hillman walked, floated, swum into the room. "I may have a suggestion," he said.

"Your previous suggestions were worse than useless," Dorn reminded him.

"Yes," Lara added, "first you told us to revive art, but I could not paint. Then you mentioned the joys of music, but Dorn could not learn to play, and I have no capacity for distinguishing octaves. No, Hillman. There is nothing with which we can fill our days."

"Go outside," Hillman said.

Dorn looked at his metal savant in horror. "You know that's impossible."

"He will die," Lara said, "and then there will be nothing, not even a promise, left for me. I would rather die myself and by my own hand."

"Go outside," Hillman repeated. "It is the only possibility left. There is nothing else here for you."

"Hillman," Dorn said, "I think that perhaps you are malfunctioning. However, I am ready to do it."

"You can't!" Lara said.

"Very likely," Dorn agreed, "but I can try."

Now? The non-voices whispered.

Soon.

Once more Dorn was back on the catwalk. But not alone.

"I cannot look up," Dorn said.

The Earth hung above them, a sphere full of emotion and deadliness.

"Look," Lara said, and Dorn looked.

Blue.

This time his mind only wavered. Lara was there to ease it when it swayed.

No words passed between them. Neither did they touch. But, they shared—and understood.

In their understanding was their purpose, and their year was no longer empty. A hollowness had been filled in by Destiny.

They knew what they had to be.

Now? the thousand entities asked.

Now!

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The *Ezkeel* landed. They set down in their primal ball of fire only yards from the two humans.

They walked out and spoke. Mind to mind, and also over the suit-radios.

"We have contacted you," the First said.

"After three hundred years of waiting," said the Second.

The Two then coalesced their thoughts into a simultaneous communication.

"You have learned your Destiny," they said. "It is well you have done this on your own; now only details remain to be discussed."

"Who are you?" either Dorn or Lara asked.

Three hundred years ago the *Ezkeel* had been searching, and finally they found what they sought. It was a small world, but it harbored intelligent life, as must so many others. But the Universe is vast. Knowing that something must exist is only the first and smallest step to the finding of it.

Their mission was to give a new race, any new race, everything that was stored in the *Ezkeel* racial mind. And, there was nothing they didn't know. Nothing.

This was their glory and their death-wish.

There were no further paths to follow. They had taken their own minds as far as they thought they could go. They theorized that, after a time, every race would reach a level whereafter further knowledge is useless—in that there is no wish to apply it.

They had reached their door, and found it closed and locked. Racial apathy overcame them.

All that was left was to give what they had to a new race, a race who would take the knowledge further.

And they found that race. But when they returned there from a brief sojourn home, they found only death.

They had not known such things were possible.

Only two were left, on the planet's primary.

Traditionally fighting.

"And so you brought us together," Dorn supplied.

Yes.

"And now?" Lara asked.

You already know your destiny.

It was Lara who said it first. "To return home," she said.

Yes. After all these centuries you and others like you will return with you. Then you will receive the knowledge of the Ezkeel."

"Others like us?" Dorn's voice was questioning.

Yes. Hillman has cells from the original Master, which he duplicates at need. You, yourself, Dorn, were produced in such a way. And for females, we made

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sure that the underground cell-banks of Fortress Hope were not destroyed. Millions of you will return home. A myriad Dorns and a myriad Laras, genetically alike, but with the potential of difference. You will repopulate your old, dead world, and accept our gift. Then, the Ezkeel *may die, knowing we have accomplished all possible.*

"No!" Dorn said, and Lara's denial was only a microsecond later.

You must. It is the only way.

"We will return," Dorn said, "but the two of us, and only two."

"We have found our purpose," Lara said, "and it isn't yours."

What then is your purpose?

Dorn and Lara spoke as one. "To remain human, and to be only what that implies."

Failure. The word carried throughout the Universes.

"Not failure," Dorn said softly, "but success, more than you know."

But the *Ezkeel* had left, and taken their silence with them.

Dorn and Lara looked up at the Earth.

"Soon," he said.

"Very soon," she replied, moving closer to his side.

"They will be watching," he said, "always waiting."

"They will think we will contact them," Lara said. "That if we do not, then our descendants will. And they may be right." Her voice rose and Dorn could feel her body shiver through the multi-layered suits that they both wore.

"Free knowledge," she said, "is a frightful incentive."

"To take it though," Dorn said, "would be to sentence the givers to death, and that would not be a human thing to do."

"No, Dorn. It would not be a human thing—and all of our descendants will be human."

"They will be that," Dorn said. He laughed, and smiling, pulled Lara closer to him.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Because our descendants *will* call them, but not for the reason the *Ezkeel* expect."

"You're right," Lara said and she too smiled as she saw the truth. "Ours will teach the *Ezkeel*," she said, and laughed.

"Yes, Lara, they will teach them life."

Lara turned so that the Earth-light reflected from off the glass faceplate and glistened in the stillness of her eyes, "And, Dorn," she said, "that is also a very human thing to do."

Fortress Desire became obscured in shadow as they moved further out from the catwalk. They knew that when they returned to the Fortress it would be but for a little while. There was a journey before them.

The beginning was a human thing. ◄

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F&SF's versatile cartoonist has also contributed book reviews, fiction and an occasional cover. His latest story is not long on words, but it is colossal in both concept and audacity. To say more would perhaps spoil a great deal of fun.

M-1

by Gahan Wilson

SEEN FROM ACROSS THE DESert, from miles away, the statue had been dwarfed and easily understood, and Henderson had smiled at its familiar outlines as he sat in the bouncing jeep. Now, climbing from the jeep at the statue's base, he found it unrecognizably distorted by its grotesque height.

Bentley, sweating in khaki, came up to him and shook his hand.

"You'll break your neck if you keep gawking up at it like that," he said, smiling.

They stood near the statue's left foot, a huge, gleaming thing of curving yellow.

"Five hundred and thirty feet from here to the top of its toe," said Bentley. "Sixteen hundred feet from the toe to the heel. Four hundred and eighty feet across at its widest point."

The two men walked to the side of the foot, and Henderson reached out to lay his hand flat against its surface. The Nevada sun had made it uncomfortably hot to touch. He moved his hand back and forth over the gleaming yellow and marveled at its smoothness.

"It's like butter!" he said.

Bentley nodded, lighting a cigarette and squinting up.

"No damned traction possible, to speak of," he said. "Makes climbing around on the thing a real bitch. And you can't dig steps into it, you can't even drive stakes to hold ropes. Folger slid off its instep, yesterday. Would have fallen to his death if he hadn't managed to grab the scaffold."

Against the side of the foot, and extending part way up the shank of the black leg, the towering scaffold looked absurdly small and unimportant next to the bulk of the statue. Henderson could see an

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army of men working at the top of it, slowly extending it.

"I can't decide if we're building another Eiffel Tower or playing with Tinkertoys," said Bentley. "You get funny shifts in your self-image, living with this thing."

He pushed his cigarette into the sand with his foot.

"You want to wash up and all that, or do you want to get on with looking it over?"

"Let's look it over."

"Right," said Bentley. He signaled to a man who detached himself from a group standing by the entrance to one of the scaffold's elevators and came walking toward them. The man wore curved sunglasses and a leather jacket. He was lean and had an easy stride. Bentley introduced him to Henderson.

"This is Captain Harry Grant. Captain Grant's on loan to us from the Navy, and how far away from water can you get? He flies us around the statue so we can all get a better look at it and fully realize how little we understand it. He hasn't lost one of us yet."

They shook hands and the three of them began walking over to the helicopter which stood on a little pad of concrete. Like everything else next to the statue, it looked tiny and delicate.

"Sometimes I like to get the layman's point of view, Harry," said Bentley. "What do you make of our wonder?"

Grant smiled and shook his head.

"I used to like him when I was a kid," he said, pointing up at the statue with his thumb. "But now I don't know. Now I think he scares me."

"I believe you've got just about as far with him as us scientists, Harry," said Bentley.

They climbed into the helicopter and Grant started the big blades turning. Henderson peered up at the statue through the lightening blur.

The helicopter began to climb, slowly. When it drew abreast of the top of the scaffold, several of the men turned to wave at them. Bentley smiled and waved back.

"I wish we could get that thing to climb as quickly as this gadget," he said. "I figure with all the luck in the world we might get up to its left tit by late August."

They had reached its midsection, now. Its red pants sparkled in the sunlight, and the two vast yellow buttons seemed to twinkle.

"The buttons are two hundred feet across," said Bentley. "You get so you can really rattle off the statistics. They have a way of burning themselves into your head."

"Have you tried digging into its upper parts?" asked Henderson. He'd never been in a helicopter before. It wasn't as hard speaking over the roar of the propellers as he had thought it would be.

"Hell, yes," said Bentley. "Once,

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in a fit of pique, old Wellman even let fly at it with an explosive rocket. Didn't leave a goddamn mark."

Now they were up to its black, sprawling chest. One of its arms hung down at its side, the other was raised high in a titanic salute.

"We've had expeditions on the head and shoulders times past counting. We've drilled at it, lit fires on it, poured acid over it, and usually ended up kicking at it with our feet. None of it's had the slightest effect. I honestly don't think an H bomb would dent it."

Suddenly they were opposite its face and Henderson found the confrontation unexpectedly horrible. Somehow this nearness to the head was the thing which brought the monstrous enormity of the statue home to him. He had to look from side to side to follow the sweep of the inane grin. Sitting there in the helicopter, hovering just feet away from the swollen bulb at the end of the thing's nose, Henderson had an abrupt and hideously convincing fantasy that the statue would come to life and crush them with a pinch of its tremendous yellow fingers.

The helicopter worked its way past a gigantic black eye set into the blinding whiteness of the face, around to the side of the head where the craft swung by one of the circular ears.

"The ears are quite thin, really," said Bentley. "Only average about seven feet thick. The flat surface has a diameter of over one thousand feet. The point of attachment to the head is a piddling one hundred foot line around three feet thick. Gives you an idea of the structural peculiarities of our friend, here, doesn't it? We've mounted recording devices on the ears, just to see, and we've found they don't even wiggle in a high wind. If we tried to build something like that out of what we've got on hand in our advanced technology—you'll excuse the ironic tone, I'm sure—we'd find we couldn't."

Henderson stared at the ear as the helicopter rose gently over its upper curve.

"Somebody built it," he said.

"That's right," said Bentley. "Somebody has. And they put it up here between National flight 405, which didn't see anything at all when it passed by here at 4:38 p.m., Wednesday, February the seventh, and 5:17, the same date, when the Reno air taxi flew right into the son of a bitch."

"Why didn't they see it?"

"My own theory is that they did see it," said Bentley. "They just couldn't believe it. Saw the damned thing smiling away at them with its big eyes with the little chips cut out of the sides, saw it waving at them in the moonlight—and there was plenty of moonlight, I checked—and maybe the pilot thought of a movie he'd seen once, or a Big Little Book, I don't

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know, and maybe he was screaming, and he just smashed into it."

They were over the top of its head, now. Henderson looked down at the shadow speck the helicopter made move across the shiny black dome of the statue's skull. Far, far down below he could see the long, thin, curling tail coming out of the rear of the bright red pants. Bentley followed the direction of his stare and smiled.

"Seven thousand feet, if you straightened it out," he said.

The helicopter began to descend. Henderson folded his hands and looked down at his knuckles. He didn't want to see any more of the statue, not just now.

Bentley lit a cigarette and shook the match out carefully.

"It's still a rumor," he said. "But it's checking out better all the time."

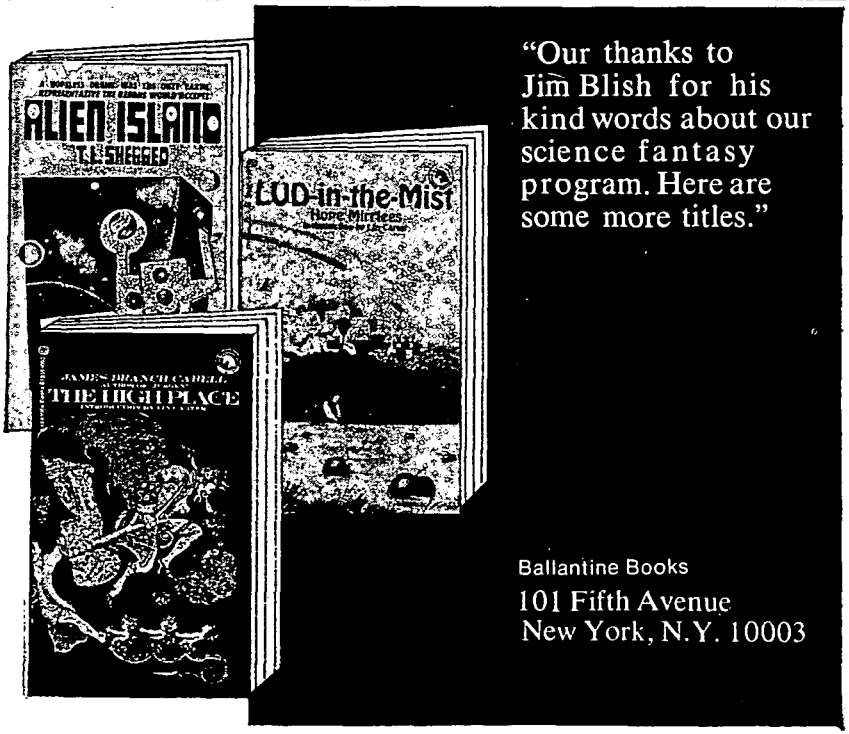
Henderson was watching him.

"The last word I got on it came from Schillar," said Bentley. "He believes it. He said Brandt told him he'd seen photographs."

"What do you mean?" asked Henderson. "What's true?"

Bentley licked his lips.

"They say the Russians got Minnie."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BOOKS

James Branch Cabell: FIGURES OF EARTH.
James Branch Cabell: THE SILVER STALLION.
Lord Dunsany: THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER.
William Morris: THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD.
Fletcher Pratt: THE BLUE STAR.
All from Ballantine Books, New York, paper, 95¢: 1969.

All right, let's talk about fantasy for a change, since Ballantine has given me the chance to do so, through their new "Adult Fantasy" colophon under the general editorship of (and with introductions by) Lin Carter.

All these novels are reprints, but as far as today's reader is concerned, they might just as well be new. To take them in chronological order: The prose romances of William Morris, of which THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD (1895) was the first, have been out of print for so long that book dealers ask prices in three figures for them. The Dunsany appeared in 1924 and (like the others here) has never before been in paperback. The Cabells have been out of print for three decades; and the Pratt previously appeared *only* as part of a 1952 Twayne Triplet called WITCHES THREE, together with better remembered but considerably less distinguished pieces (both reprints) by Fritz Leiber and myself, which apparently sold only a few thousand copies.

The Morris novel, which Carter (correctly, I believe) calls the very first heroic fantasy novel in English, is by a small margin the most difficult of the five to read today because of its stylistic mannerisms (though all of these works are somewhat mannered, in distinctly different ways). While he was originating a new prose form, Morris also inadvertently started a less attractive tradition in letters, which dictates that original fairy-tales and romantic fantasies must be intoned. Even today, young writers who have already shown that they can

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write perfectly straightforward narrative prose automatically begin to talk through their noses the moment they turn to fantasy. (Part of Tolkien's appeal may be his rejection of, or inability to sustain, this psuedo-bardic tone for his bardic subject-matter.)

Morris had a good reason for doing this: In seeking late 19th Century English readers for an original fantasy with a medieval setting, he wanted to invoke the supporting memory and style of Sir Thomas Malory (who by modern classification was not a novelist but a reteller, in a style already archaic for its own time, of the Arthurian cycle of legends). He did it well, all the way down to the marginal glosses and the nonstop compound sentences hitched together with scores of semicolons. He also recaptured much of the poetry; and if the reader will make the small effort necessary to accommodatē himself to the rhythm of the style, he will find both it and the story rewarding.

Lord Dunsany also had a decided tendency to intone, but his style is both simpler and peculiarly his own. The following sample from the present book illustrates both the manner, and the one article of his artistic creed:

"But the Freer raised up his hand against unicorns and cursed them yet. 'Curst be their horn,' he cried, 'and the place where they dwell, and the lilies whereon they feed, curst be all songs that tell of them. Curst be they utterly with everything that dwelleth beyond salvation.'

"He paused to allow them to renounce the unicorns, standing still in the doorway, looking sternly into the room.

"And they thought of the sleekness of the unicorn's hide, his swiftness, the grace of his neck, and his dim beauty cantering by when he came past Erl in the evening. They thought of his stalwart and redoubtable horn; they remembered old songs that told of him. They sat in uneasy silence and would not renounce the unicorn."

Here, as for a number of later writers, fantasy has become a faith, as well as a gênre. Not only did Dunsany invent his own style for it, but even his own mythology —as did his friend and contemporary, Yeats (and again, several later men). He was primarily a short-story writer and playwright, and from experience one would expect his few novels to be long on episodes and short on structure; this one decidedly is not.

By the time this column sees print, Ballantine will have reissued another Cabell novel, FIGURES OF EARTH, and it is useful to consider this and THE SILVER

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STALLION together. From 1904 to 1929, Cabell produced twenty books which together came to be called BIOGRAPHY OF THE LIFE OF MANUEL. This work contains something of everything: novels, many short stories, a play, a volume of verse, and even two volumes of literary criticism. By my count (and every Cabell scholar has a different figure), eight of these books—including his still-remembered JURGEN—actually are closely interrelated; the rest were simply carpentered into the overall scheme, not without considerable resort to chewing gum and piano wire.

FIGURES OF EARTH is the only one which is about Manuel himself, although he appears as a ghost in two of the other seven novels, so it is the best place for the new reader to start. It is the account of the rise of Manuel from a simple pig-tender to the overlordship of Poictesme, an imaginary French-Provencal country, in the early 13th Century—a rise accomplished by some fighting, a lot of magic, and the betrayal by Manuel of everyone who had anything to do with Manuel, including himself.

As I hope this summary suggests, the effect of this heroic fantasy is rather anti-romantic despite its materials, an effect reinforced by Cabell's style. This too is mannered (though the manner varies with the period he is writing about) and nearly unique (there are traces in it of early Maurice Hewlett). One of its chief characteristics, as H. L. Mencken noted at the time, is that his people talk about high deeds and terrible magics as matter-of-factly as they do about pawnbrokerage and housecleaning; they burst into poetry only when they are trying to dupe another character, or when they are talking about humanity's dreams (for fantasy was an article of faith with Cabell, too). The result is a continuous ironic interplay; Cabell is the only fantasy author known to me prior to L. Sprague de Camp who is genuinely witty, and even outright comic on occasion.

THE SILVER STALLION is the immediate sequel. Manuel conquered Poictesme as the leader of a band of ten lords called the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion. After his death this was disbanded, and this volume ostensibly tells what happened to each of seven of these lords subsequently. (The fates of the other two are not revealed in detail until Vol. 20!) In addition, Manuel makes one of his two ghostly appearances here, and Jurgen plays a small role in both volumes. The major story, however, is the transformation of the venal, brutal, scheming, loveless, faithless and slightly stupid Dom Manuel into a religious Redeemer in the minds of his peo-

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ple, a theme bursting with possibilities for comedy which Cabell exploits to the hilt.

Cabell, like Dunsany, invented his own mythology, though in his case it is put together playfully from real legends, myths and faiths in bewildering variety, ranging all the way from the Chippewa to the Chinese, plus some outright imaginary ones. Scholars are still struggling to annotate all this material, but the reader, unless he likes this kind of puzzle, can simply let it slide by.

In his introduction to FIGURES OF EARTH, Lin Carter calls Cabell "the single greatest fantasy novelist that America has ever produced." There's no doubt about this—and I don't know of any double fantasy novelists who were his equal, either.

Fletcher Pratt—who for a while *was* one half of a double—shows up very well in this company, an outcome which certainly couldn't have been predicted from his solo science fiction, which I at least thought uniformly vile, or from his work with de Camp, where one constantly wondered how much of it was attributable to the known mastery of his collaborator. The relatively few people who have both read THE WELL OF THE UNICORN, and know that its "George U. Fletcher" was Pratt, will be less surprised by THE BLUE STAR, however.

Both books follow E. R. Eddison in the creation of a complete imaginary world (a different one for each novel), although the hands of Morris and Dunsany are also admittedly present in the first one. All three predecessors have virtually disappeared from THE BLUE STAR, except for the retention of Eddison's awkward device of framing the main story as a dream: and the imaginary world, instead of being borrowed from Dunsany, is the Earth of about Napoleon's time with the addition of a workable magic—the "world of If" device originated by Pratt himself, with de Camp, only a decade earlier.

The blue star of the title is the gem which gives a witch her power; she may retain both only until she loses her virginity, after which both gem and power pass to her lover. Such a situation obviously would generate a great deal of intrigue and emotional conflict, and Pratt shows himself equal to its potentialities. Indeed, the depth of characterization in this book is alone a source of astonishment; it suggests that in this department the exigencies of the collaboration might actually have been holding Pratt back, at least in Pratt's last years . . . but such speculation is unprofitable.

The style, too, is more flexible and more evocative than in any other work of Pratt's, solo or in

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tandem. It contains one peculiarity: Pratt drops the thoughts of the viewpoint characters, between parentheses, into the text the moment they occur, no matter what this interrupts—sometimes they even appear inside other people's speeches. This is off-putting at first, but one soon gets used to the convention, and by the end of the novel—when Pratt himself seems more at home with it than he was at the outset—one begins to suspect that it is a promising, though minor, technical innovation.

These five reprints are as well-produced as they are well-selected, and augur well for the future of the Ballantine "Adult Fantasy" line. I'll hope to comment further on later releases.

Josephine Saxton: THE HIEROS GAMOS OF SAM AND AN SMITH, Doubleday, 1969. 138 pp., $4.50

Doubleday is marketing this decidedly overpriced novella as science fiction, but it could be so classified only by the sloppiest New Wave standards. The main body of the story does contain many of the trappings of the post-catastrophe, Adam-and-Eve s-f story, but these are either illusory, or the ending is an illusion; the two cannot be reconciled, and of the two I think the main text probably the most likely to be a parable, the ending a return to reality.

To deal with the trappings first: The hero is a fourteen-year-old boy who has been on his own for the preceding ten years, in a world which contains very few human beings or animals, living mostly on what he can liberate from deserted shops. He runs from what people he does meet, but eventually rescues from between the thighs of its dead mother a just-born girl, whom he educates and eventually mates with. Soon they too have a child. End of plot.

But this rather standard situation is full of inconsistencies. In the deserted world, power is still on—including full functioning of complex machines like electric-eye door-openers, and slot machines which dispense both hot and refrigerated food though nobody is about to either service or restock them. The boy makes complicated, semi-precious allusions to cerulean-blue water-color and to Robert the Bruce, and quotes Christ on the cross in Hebrew 22 pages before he first encounters the Bible. At crucial moments in his life he receives telegrams, yellow envelope and all. Though he knows absolutely nothing about how to care for a baby, in caring for this one he makes virtually no errors, even minor ones. He seems to be being watched over constantly by some beneficent older person, apparently a woman—who at one point

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supplies him with a pile of books by holy men, nut-cult founders, and (I was unflattered to find) me.

To be frank about it, I at first assumed that the author didn't know what the hell she was up to. Her reference to the beam of the electric-eye door-opener as an "electronic ray," and the mysterious functioning and restocking of the slot machines, made me suspect that she is one of those parabolists who think themselves superior to mere mechanism and to literary consistency.

But then came the ending, which is *really* peculiar: After Sam and An have their daughter, they gather up their belongings, take a bus to a suburban home, and resume (?) ordinary suburban living, television and all. The unpopulated world of all the rest of the story vanishes as though it had never been. This inconsistency is so gigantic, and so obviously deliberate, as to suggest that the smaller ones were equally deliberate, and that the whole story is a kind of parable.

A parable illustrating what? Evidently, the author's view of the essentials of "hieros gamos"—priestly marriage. This is not a novel of post-Bomb survival, but a *Bildungsroman,* the story of the education of a soul. On this level it makes perfect symbolic sense that the White Goddess cum bus-driver supplies the hero with the collected works of Charles Fort rather than a copy of The Handbook of Chemistry and Physics; the hero's raising of his daughter/bride is a story of the growth in knowledge and sympathy in an ideal courtship; the wasteland is not a real wasteland, but the loneliness of the soul even in a populated world until it is twinned. Only after all this has been gone through can parenthood—and even television—be rewarding.

In my opinion, books like those of Madame Blavatsky, or JACK OF EAGLES for that matter, are as bad for the budding soul as they are for the budding critical intelligence, but this is not the issue: they serve here as deliberate symbols for concern with the psyche rather than with physical survival, so it does not matter that I would have chosen a different list.

But I do object to the bad break in the tissue of the parable which occurs at the end. The Adam-and-Eve story has been told mostly realistically, and it is resolved by a complete change in the universe of discourse—it becomes, briefly but disastrously, another parable altogether. The endings of THE CASTLE and THE TRIAL take place in the same worlds in which they began, and without any sacrifice of dramatic or didactic effect. No fair, Mrs. Saxton; you didn't think it through.

—JAMES BLISH

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"Very well, Miss Apple—call my broker."

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The background of this new Brigadier Ffellowes story is East Africa, in a range of forested hills near Mt. Kenya. The Brigadier has been sent on a mission to locate an enemy intelligence agent, a routine "hunting" expedition, which—as you might expect if you've followed this series—turns into something quite different and frightening.

HIS ONLY SAFARI

by Sterling E. Lanier

MASON WILLIAMS WAS IN great form that evening. Or so an admirer would have described him, if he'd had any admirers. A lot of us in the club were still trying to find out how he'd ever been elected in the first place. The election committee, of course, will never say anything, but we were pretty sure they had blundered and were now pretending not to notice it.

Anyhow, Williams had just come back from Africa. He had bought himself a complete safari there, the iced champagne and hot bath kind, and got himself a lot of stuffed animal heads, also bought, if many of our suspicions were correct.

"Yes, I went alone," he brayed, so that you could hear him across the library. "Real hunting, just me and the white hunter, two 'pros', if I do say so."

"Since the hunter was being paid, he couldn't refuse to go along, now could he?" said someone in a perfectly audible aside. Williams got red, but refused to take notice. He was going to tell us all about it if it killed him.

It was pretty bad. I'm no hunter but I knew enough to know Williams knew absolutely nothing. Bits of it filtered through despite my attempts to read a paper.

"Used a Bland .470 express at 300 yards on that baby! —Have

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to watch your step with kudu— The hunter told me the Grant's would be a near record— Slept with loaded guns because lions were prowling around." Et cetera, et cetera.

On and on it went. No one was really listening, but we were all damned if we'd allow Williams to drive us out of the library. Besides being warm and cosy there, it was a foggy, November night, and the city streets outside were dim and dirty.

Brigadier Ffellowes' even voice cut in neatly during one of Williams' infrequent pauses for breath, and we all sat up and felt considerably more cheerful. Our retired English artilleryman had made one of his usual unobtrusive entrances and was toasting himself, back to the big fireplace, his ruddy face smiling gently.

"I wonder if you glimpsed a place I visited once, Williams?" he said in a musing tone. "A tribe of dark, hawk-faced men lived there in an ancient, ruined city. They were ruled by a white, veiled priestess who made claim to some incredible age. Why, it must have been in the very area you were hunting over."

Williams had never read *She,* or much else except market sheets, but this was too raw even for him.

"I suppose you know all about Africa," he said furiously. "After all, you British used to practically run the place until the natives got wise and ran you out. Probably you got some great sun-and-sand African hunting stories, too, General." (He knew Ffellowes hated being called 'General'.)

"Why not give us one, pal?" he went on. "A lousy American businessman can't hardly compete with a real pucker say-hib, eh wot?" Williams is a horrible man, honestly.

Ffellowes never batted an eye. Nothing infuriated Williams more than the realization that nothing he could say seemed to bother the Englishman. Now the brigadier kept his serene smile as he drew himself an armchair and sat down near us. Very tangentially, he somehow managed to make a circle of chairs, so that Williams was left standing outside it and had to wedge himself half under the mantelpiece so as to even hear.

"I only once ever went on what might be called a safari," he said, "and my chief memory is not of heat, oddly enough. It's of cold, cold and mist, weather not unlike tonight, don't you know. But the mist was both thicker and wetter, as well as cleaner, of course. And the quiet was nothing like the city. Oh, that quiet!"

He was silent for a moment. The faint hooting of traffic was the only sound in the room. Suddenly, Ffellowes' gift for dominating a group had started operating again. His precise, level speech resumed abruptly.

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"I was up in the Aberdares in December of '39, more because no one else was handy than for any special skill of my own, as will become apparent.

"Any of you know them? Well, they are a range of forested hills in Kenya that go quite high in some places and lie about fifty miles west of Mt. Kenya itself. There is heavy forest up to 11,000 feet in many places, and surprising amounts of big game, bongo, some Cape buffalo and even elephant. Leopard, of course, but no lions, unless poor Gandar Dower was right and an unknown, small, spotted species used to live there.

"Into this area I had been sent by His Majesty's Government to look for a missing man. His name was Guido Bruckheller, and he had an Austrian name but was an Italian zoologist, a Ph.D. from Bolzano originally, I believe. He apparently had done some excellent work on tropical rodents as disease vectors. Out of my line by miles. But he was in Military Intelligence's books also, as a most dangerous Axis agent. The fellow spoke a dozen African languages and was a real bushman to boot. He had been staying in Nairobi, watched carefully, but as a nominal Italian citizen, no more than that, since Mussolini was technically neutral at this time.

"Well, it was the period of the so-called 'phoney war' in France. Poland was dished and we were simply waiting for the onslaught. I was on my way back from a certain job in India when I got orders to sidetrack to Nairobi, and at once. Bruckheller had vanished and supposedly a trained intelligence man was wanted to follow up and find him.

"I found the local security people dithering all over the map. They had the wind up badly and seemed to feel this chap could start a second Senussi uprising or something unless he was caught up with promptly. Personally, mind you, I thought it all a lot of rubbish. One man is just that, one man, and there had been no reports of any trouble among the tribes in western Kenya. Still, the fellow *had* vanished and he was supposed to be hot stuff. The locals could have handled it better, I thought.

"There was only one clue as to where he had gone. Two white farmers, out hunting about their farms on the Chania River, thought they'd seen a white man and some natives cross a clearing much higher up the slope, at dawn three days earlier. Since the colony was now at war and most of the able-bodied whites were gone, they'd reported it to the local police post at Nyeri, whence it had come in to H.Q. Nairobi. This was absolutely the only report from the whole of Kenya of anyone or anything out of place, and

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so we had to assume it was our lead.

"Since I didn't know the territory, some local talent was needed. What I got was an elderly major of the local volunteer defense force who'd been with Meinertzhagen in Tanganyika during the First World War, and a middle-aged, one-armed Boer farmer from up north somewhere who said he'd come for the fun of it. Their names were Sizenby and Krock—and this Krock, the Boer, made very bad jokes, starting with 'I am a *young* Krock not an English old crock, *neen?*' We also got six King's African Rifles under a sixty-year-old Kikuyu sergeant named Asoto, who stood five feet six and weighed two hundred pounds, all of it muscle.

"The whole place, I mean Nairobi, was such a hotbed of gossip that half the town must have been in on our mission. One chap buttonholed Sizenby in the Mithaiga Club the night before we left, and said, rather incoherently, 'Now do look out, Size. The *Kerit* is out in Aberdares. My boys tell me it took four cattle and a grown man last week.'

" 'What on earth was that, Major?' I asked Sizenby when we were outside in the street.

" 'Oh, nothing,' he mumbled. 'Lot of fiddle. Supposed to be some animal, quite dangerous up that way, but no one's ever really seen it. Chap was drunk.'

"I stopped still for a moment. You know, I'd never thought of *animals* at all. We were after a man, who might or might not be dangerous, but there was a largish war on and that was normal. But animals now! 'Look here,' I said, 'what animal is this? Surely not a lion? A leopard? What did that chap say?'

"Sizenby chewed a ratty grey mustache for a bit. He was an undersized creature in an ill-fitting uniform and with a vague blue eye. Frankly, he looked pretty hopeless, but he and the Boer were all I could get, and he was supposed to know the country.

" 'It has several native names,' he said slowly. '*Chimiset* is one, *Kerit* another. Now and again it makes the papers. Then it usually gets called the Nandi Bear.'

"The Nandi Bear! Well, you know, even I had heard of that. It was supposed to be the mystery beast of East Africa and made the Sunday supplements regularly along with the Lost Valley of the Nahanni, the Loch Ness monster, and supposed living dinosaurs.

" 'That's a lot of hooh-hah, isn't it?' I said. 'I mean really, I thought it was all rot and old settlers' tales. Do you think there is such a creature? I mean actually?'

"He looked at the ground and mumbled again. It was quite obvious he did think there was some-

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thing to the story, and that he didn't like it at all. I was both intrigued and annoyed. Just then, however, along came the general commanding the colony forces, and I found out he knew all about my mission and had some ideas of his own. In the ensuing, and I may add, pointless, discussion, I quite forgot the *Kerit,* sometimes called Nandi Bear.

"We left at dawn the next day, all in an army truck for Nyeri, our jumping-off point. I was formally introduced to the other ranks—that is, the K.A.R. boys—and forgot all their names, except Sergeant Asoto's, at once. Two were Somalis, the rest Kikuyu; that's all I remember, except that they were all good, brave men.

"Now a road of sorts, really a baddish dirt track, barely usable for sturdy vehicles, ran west across the south end of the Aberdare range, going from Nyeri to Naivasha. This we took at once after checking for more news in Nyeri, where there was none. We went up and up in our truck, crashing into pot holes and large rocks until the air actually began to get quite chilly.

" 'Now,' said Krock, reaching me a heavy sweater, 'you see why we bring all this stuff. It gets colder yet, I tell you.' Everyone, including the troops, bundled up, and we all needed it.

"Toward evening, we broke out onto the open plateau, first from the dense rain forest which covered the slopes to about 10,000 feet, and then from a belt of bamboo. Up here, in the light of the setting sun, it looked most unlike my idea of Africa. If I'd had a chance later, I'd have traded even for the bamboo.

"Before us stretched a cheerless-looking moor, with here and there an outcropping of rock or a plant like a monstrous cabbage on a stalk, or simply a great vegetable spike, raising its head above the tussocky grass. It was absolutely weird looking, and the setting sun made it resemble a patch of Dartmoor crossed with a bad dream. A cold wind blew fitfully across it and I shivered.

"The truck ground to a halt. Sizenby and Krock hopped out and began chatting up the local gossip and the sergeant and his six whirled into galvanized activity. In ten minutes two tents were up, a small one for us three and a large one for them, two fires were crackling, and the smell of food and wood smoke were in the air. I had nothing to do at all, so I wandered over to listen absently to Krock and Sizenby, speculating to myself meanwhile on what Bruckheller was doing and why. During a pause in the conversation, I interrupted to ask the same question aloud. Perhaps these two might have some fresh ideas, since I had none.

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"'Oh, I know why he's here,' said Sizenby, quite matter-of-fact. 'I knew him, you know; not a bad chap but a bit daft. He's up here because of Egypt.' Just like that! And after I'd been racking my brains for two days!

"'Now look, Major,' I said, 'what on earth are you talking about?' We had moved to our fire and were standing grouped about it. It was quite dark now, and a white ground mist had formed and lay thick about the camp. There was no moon.

"'What is this?' I repeated. 'Why haven't you mentioned knowing this man before? No one else in Nairobi seems to even have talked with him.'

"'Well, you never asked me and it didn't seem important,' he said quietly. 'I rather liked the man. We're both curious chaps, and we found some of the same things interesting. At any rate, Bruckheller's quite dotty on the subject of Egyptology. I know he's a zoologist not an archaeologist, but he has a hobby horse like most of us, and his is ancient Egypt. He was always at me about it. Had I ever seen any Egyptian ruins in these parts, heard of any rock paintings that might be Egyptian looking and so on? For some reason he's convinced the early Pharaohs went north from around here. He was following his theory down from Ethiopia.'

"I thought for a moment. It all sounded completely mad, but then people's interests frequently *are* mad. Still, it wouldn't wash.

"'I gather you think that in the middle of a war, knowing that aliens, even neutrals, are subject to arrest for moving in unauthorized areas, this fellow, who is supposed, mind you, to be a trained secret agent, wandered up here to look for Egyptian ruins?'

"'Yes,' said Sizenby, 'I rather think he did. He was that sort of chap. And I think he'd heard something, d'you see, something that set him off, some recent news from this part of the colony. And perhaps he felt he wouldn't get another chance to see whatever it was.'

"I mulled this over, holding my hands to the fire. The next question was obvious.

"'Neen,' said Krock, who had simply been listening up to now. 'Nothing new comes from here in the last year, I tell you. I hear all the news, man, you bet. Only the —' his voice lowered and he looked over his shoulder at the group of K.A.R. around the other fire, 'the *Gadet*, the *Kerit* being out up here, that's new.'

"Sizenby looked at me attentively, but I remembered the conversation outside the Mithaiga Club with no trouble.

"'I doubt the Nandi Bear, or ancient Egypt either, has much to do with this,' I said sourly. 'Ob-

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viously the man received certain orders and followed them. All this bumph and Egypt and—'

" 'Better lower your voice, Captain,' Sizenby cut in, speaking softly. 'The men don't like to hear about the *Kerit,* and there's no point in upsetting them needlessly.'

" 'Yah, that's so,' chimed in the Boer. 'We don't talk about it around them.'

"The one-armed South African and the little settler were oddly impressive up here in the cold mountain air. Sizenby had lost the vagueness I'd noted earlier and seemed both tougher and more self-assured. He was telling me to shut up in a very firm way, and I got quite irritated.

" 'What on earth is all this?' I said heatedly. 'You two can't really expect me to believe in all this hogwash, mystery animals and Egyptian ruins? Suppose you simply tell me how to find the chap and leave the abstruse speculation to me, eh?'

"Sizenby stared at me a minute and then called over to the other fire. 'Sergeant Asoto, come over here a moment, will you?'

"In a second, Asoto's squat, immaculately uniformed bulk stood immobile before us, hand at the rigid salute. Sizenby and I returned it, Krock being a 'civie.'

" 'Sergeant,' said Sizenby slowly, 'the Ingrezi captain thinks we're having a bit of fun with him. I want you to tell him about the *Kerit.* I know you and your men all know it's out again. Say nothing to the men about my asking this, but simply tell everything you know.'

"The broad, dark face which turned to me was certainly not that of any frightened child, the brown eyes were calm, and the deep voice controlled.

" 'The *Kerit* is very bad, Captain,' he said, in quite fair English. 'No one sees it until it kills. In certain places no one ever lives, because sooner or later it comes there. It takes strong men as easily as children, cattle as easily as goats. Nothing can stand against it. Now, we hear, all of us, that one or two are out and walking around in these mountains somewhere. It is nothing to laugh about. It is too serious a matter. Only those who live very far off joke about it. We must be careful, I do say so.' He stopped, apparently feeling he had said enough on the subject.

"I must say, I was impressed in spite of myself. One had to be, you know.

" 'Is it a real animal, Sergeant,' I said, after a moment's thought, 'or could it be human, an evil man or men?'

" 'I have seen its tracks many years ago,' was the deep-throated answer. 'They are a little bit like an old lion with his claws out, but much more long and more

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big too. No man could make such a track. But in its cunning it is like no animal. No one sees it and lives.'

"Well, that seemed to be that. I thanked him and he saluted and went back to his other ranks' fire. Then I apologized to Sizenby and Krock. To tell the truth, I didn't know what to think. I had either encountered a case of mass hallucination or something even stranger.

"We turned in shortly thereafter and I got very little sleep, being cold, damp and nervous. The next morning I awoke to more dense fog and a cold breakfast of biltong, or dried antelope meat. Since the others didn't complain, I could hardly do so, but I was getting a bit fed up with the Dark Continent, I may say. Not at all like the moving pictures.

"We all piled into our truck and drove off into the moorlands before the sun had burnt the mist off, and the ride was miserable indeed on that rotten excuse for a road. By noon we had crossed the spine of one hilly range and were going down again, to the west. And by the middle of the afternoon we were in a giant bamboo belt again. Here, for no reason that I could discern, we all piled off. I was damned if I'd ask questions, and I was so stiff from that infernal truck ride that I went for a quick run in a circle around the truck, just to limber up.

"The second time I circled the truck I saw to my amazement that our party had been augmented. Three tall, lean Negroes, with fringes of ringlets over aquiline faces, long spears and almost no clothes, had appeared out of nowhere, and were talking in low tones to Sizenby and the Boer. Occasionally they would gesture and several times the chief spokesman shook his head violently. Sizenby pointed to the K.A.R. lads who were standing watching and said something emphatic. The three looked gloomily at each other, but finally they nodded. Krock slapped one on the back and walked them over to Asoto and the others, while Sizenby came over to me.

"'We're in luck,' he said. 'These chaps are local hunters, Wanderobos, and they've agreed to give us some help. Seems that the two lads seen with Bruckheller may be relatives of theirs, and they're a bit worried about them.'

"'They didn't seem all that enthusiastic to me,' I said, looking over at them.

"'No, well, you saw that, hum? Fact is, the *Kerit* tends to cool one off a bit, old man. I had to point out how many rifles we had before they decided to chance it. Frankly, the odds were a thousand to one on our finding nothing until they popped up. Bruckheller is a real bushie, and if he doesn't want to be found, we could have

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a real job on our hands. These lads make the odds a little evener though.' Sizenby paused, pulled out a battered pipe and lit it, then went on through the smoke cloud, looking diffidently at me.

" 'Something occurs to me, but it's a bit mad, I dare say. We were talking a while back about Bruckheller perhaps having got some news that sent him off. Well, as Krock told you, the *Kerit* is the only news that's come in. Could he have wanted to hunt it, d'you think?'

" 'I thought you were convinced he was looking for Egyptian ruins,' I said. My tone must have been sub-acid, because he just turned away, murmuring something I couldn't catch.

"It developed that we were at present only a thousand feet or so in altitude above the place where Bruckheller, if it actually were he, had been seen. We now were going to split into three small groups and look for tracks. Since I had no other suggestion, we set off.

"Each party drew one Wanderobo hunter and one white. I had Sergeant Asoto as well as two of his men, since I couldn't speak 'derobo, or Swahili either for that matter, to say nothing of being a new chum. We all took compass bearings, checked out local maps, arranged meeting places, and set off. I wondered again what I was doing there.

"Really, the bamboo forest was most unpleasant. The sun didn't get in at all, and the forty-foot hollow stems made a strange clacking noise, as well as a dismal moaning up in the tops from the wind. It was both dank and gloomy. My mood did not improve when Asoto, who was number two in line, the hunter being first, pointed out a large pile of steaming dung in a small clearing. It was enough like ordinary cow dung to mean Cape buffalo, and the thought of meeting a herd in the close-packed bamboo was most unsettling. One could neither run nor climb.

"We moved along narrow trails, made by game, I expect. When I later heard that the Mau Mau leaders were holed up in this area after the Second World War, I assumed they'd never be caught. My memories of it are chiefly of an incomprehensible, damp maze, with no more organized pattern than a child's scribble on a blackboard.

"But the men leading me were not disconcerted. We eventually struck another small path, this time crossing ours at a right angle, and going uphill again on a slant. Here the Wanderobo called Asoto and the two soldiers into consultation, pointing at the ground. I was evidently recognized as being utterly useless in such a discussion. Out of politeness, however, Asoto called me over and saluted.

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"'See here, Captain,' he said pointing at some smudge or other on the track. 'This stupid *shenzi* (wild man) says three men, one a white man, passed along here two days ago. He may be lying but I think he knows how to follow animals.' The hunter glared at the insult, which he apparently understood, and waved his great spear while croaking out some threat or other. Asoto ignored him, except to wave him on up the new trace.

"I was in fairly good shape but I may say that I was completely dished at the end of the day. Just as planned, and accomplished through no effort of mine, we emerged from a bamboo clump into a soggy sort of large clearing and found the other two groups already there. I simply collapsed on the long grass and waved Sizenby and Krock over. I could hardly talk. My superior attitude was further weakened by the fact that neither of them—and mind you, Sizenby was in his sixties at least—looked even a bit tired. However, they were decent enough not to say anything.

"'Asoto tells me you found some sign,' said Sizenby. 'Well, so did we. They seem to have been wandering all about this area for a number of days. My group found where they'd killed a bongo, a large, rather rare antelope, and cut it up for food. Krock, tell him what you found.'

"'Yah,' said the Boer. His rifle hung in the hollow of his one arm, the right, and Sizenby had told me he was a dead shot with it. "Well, old Size here, he finds a bongo cut up for to make biltong, and I find a Wanderobo cut up for biltong. At least that's what it looks like!'

"'You don't mean there are cannibals around here?' I said. 'Are you sure?'

"'Not cannibals, old man,' said Sizenby gently. 'The *Kerit*. Maybe two. There were what appeared to be several sizes of tracks. One of its tricks is butchering its prey.'

"I sat in exhausted silence, watching the night mist begin to form and listening to the giant bamboos clattering and moaning to themselves. I could think of nothing to say.

"'What do we do now?' I asked. 'What do you think has happened?'

"'Looks to us as if the *Kerit* follows Bruckheller's party and picks them off one by one. If you want to see him at all, you got to get to him first, and quick.' The Boer's eyes were steady on mine and so were Sizenby's when I looked at him.

"'I suggest camping here,' said Sizenby. He was delicate enough to make it a suggestion, since I was technically in command. I nodded agreement. 'We have enough gear,' he went on, 'and

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food for one night. We shall post watches and fire a few rounds every so often. I have a feeling that Bruckheller may be glad to be found. The men all know what we came across, and if we try to split up, they may get a bit jouncy.'

"'Yah,' added Krock. 'And maybe they scoot, run off and leave us. I don't blame them much, I tell you.'

"Well, we ate cold grub, iron rations, and set watches. There were no tents, but we had some small bits of canvas the K.A.R. had been carrying, and it was set up so that everyone, regardless of rank, got some dryness along with some of the wet. For most of the early night we simply sat and felt miserable, at least I did, and the expressions I saw on the others were no more cheerful. We had one small fire that sputtered feebly in the middle of the clearing, but it barely kept the fog off us, let alone gave any heat. Every hour, Krock would lever off a couple of shots in the air, but we never heard an answer.

"At least until around two A.M. by my watch. Then we heard something and everyone in camp sat up and reached for a weapon, either spear or rifle.

"Far off in the fog and night came a rhythmic, regular sound. It was easy to hear because the wind had finally dropped and the bamboos had ceased their ungodly racket. We all strained our ears in the cold mountain air and listened as hard as we could. There, it came again. All thirteen of us were on our feet now, listening and staring one at the other.

"It was the sound of running feet. But more than that, it was the sound of a man running, and running, moreover, on his last legs. As the sound grew louder, we were able to focus on it and we could all face uphill, the direction from which it was coming. On and on it came, the labored, staggering run of a man who is running his heart out, pounding and lurching on in the process of burning the very last stores of vital energy. Finally we could hear the panting, gasping breath of the runner himself. We stared, transfixed, at the place in the encircling mist where the man had to emerge.

"Suddenly, the sound just stopped. There was nothing, nothing but the drip, drip of water from the leaves, the hiss of the fire and the faint movements of all of us shifting our weight. All rifles were in the ready position, and the Wanderobo hunters held their great spears poised.

"Now at this time, we were standing in a loose group, staring uphill, as I have said, no one speaking. I was in the center, Sergeant Asoto next to me, Krock and Sizenby in front of me. The three Wanderobo were near me

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on the left, and behind me were two K.A.R., with the other four on the right.

"As the silence persisted, the chill, uncanny silence, we slowly lowered our rifles and looked at one another. In the light of the small fire we were all clearly visible. All *twelve* of us!

"As we had stood, waiting for the supposed runner to break from the mist-shrouded bamboos above us, a trap, cleverly baited to appeal to human reflexes, had swung shut. Silently, swiftly, a man, the K.A.R. private who stood lowest down on the slope and thus a little behind the rest of us, had been made to disappear. And twelve heavily armed, alert men had been powerless to prevent the incredibly stealthy capture. It was a numbing realization as we stood, black and white, staring at one another while the little fire spat sparks at the bank of fog around us.

"With never a word spoken, we moved in on the fire and all faced outward at the same time. The movement was quite instinctive and, one imagines, dates from the paleolithic or earlier. Get your back to the light and face the enemy from a circle.

"For a little there was a silence again, except for the little noises of the fire and the wet leaves. Then another sound commenced. It was not far away, but impossible to register or get a fix upon.

"It was the sound of great jaws, as they crunched and tore at prey. Just that, but in the sound there was an element of—how can I convey it?—*play*. It was the noise a house cat makes as it eats the first mouse, knowing that the other mice have been forced from their holes and cannot escape, can be gathered in at any time the cat chooses. And we knew, all of us, of what the meal consisted. Sergeant Asoto said something under his breath which was not a prayer. Yet no one flinched. The Wanderobo kept as firm in the face of the threat as the disciplined soldiers. I felt rather pleased with being a man, for a fleeting second."

Ffellowes stopped, stood up in front of the fire at this point, and stretched luxuriously. All of us kept quiet, although we were as stiff as he was. We were there, with him, on that haunted mountain! Then he started again, sitting down once more.

"I suppose we were all wondering what would happen next. The initiative had been completely taken away from us, you know, in just seconds, and that's hard to bear, hard to readjust to. Happens in war, when one is ambushed. Only very highly trained men can recover in time to save themselves, can think reflexively or let reflexes and training take the place of organized thought.

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"The ghastly feeding noises ceased as suddenly as they had commenced. Before we had any time to think this over, a voice came ringing out of the rolling mist, a human voice speaking English.

" 'He-e-e-elp! Don't shoot, I'm coming in! For God's sake, don't shoot!'

"Along with the voice came the sound of running feet, just as it had before, only very close this time.

" 'Don't move, not any of us!' rasped Sizenby. 'Keep your positions; face out, rifles ready! It may be another trap.'

"We all obeyed, none moving. We needed no telling. Suddenly a man stood before us, on the uphill side of the circle, the side we had all faced the first time. His hands were up in the air and empty.

"He was a tall chap, a white man, light-haired and distinguished-looking in a way. His garments were torn, stained and filthy, ripped almost to shreds in fact, but his boots were still good. He had several days' growth of pale beard, and his light-blue eyes were glassy with what looked like fatigue. He stumbled forward and fell gasping at the feet of Krock, who happened to be the closest.

" 'Good God, it's Bruckheller,' said Sizenby crisply. 'Well, that's one problem solved. More wood on the fire, Sergeant. Drag it from the pile right there. We'll keep you covered.' The ineffectual little colonial farmer had disappeared. I could see that Sizenby might have been very useful to Smuts' army in the East African war of long ago. This was a tough frontiersman talking, and I was frankly delighted he was in charge. I'm no chicken, but I was out of my depth.

"Asoto dragged some more logs over, watched closely by all of us, and with more fuel the fire blazed up and widened the circle of light, driving back the dank wall of fog.

" 'Good,' said Sizenby. 'Now, I want the hunters in the middle, next to the fire, Sergeant, because they have no guns. Detail four men for permanent fixed watch, kneeling, rifles at ready position, one at each compass point. They are to fire at anything moving unless I say to the contrary. The hunters will keep the fire going at this level, covered by you, Mr. Krock, and the remaining private. Captain Ffellowes and I will see to this man. That is the arrangement."

"With this new battle formation, we all felt better, and you could see the men respond to the firm orders. And I can tell you, I felt better. This show was a goodish bit more than I'd bargained for.

"We both knelt by the Italian's

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head, and I lifted him until he was resting against my knee. He was not unconscious, but simply exhausted, to all appearances, and his eyes were wide open in an almost fixed glare.

" 'You are quite safe, Dr. Bruckheller,' I said, 'as well as being under arrest. Just relax and tell us what happened.'

"For a second the strange eyes just stared at me and then the man laughed, weakly but clearly. He proved, too, that he was able to speak.

" 'Safe?' he said, in excellent English. He turned his head and looked at Sizenby on the other side, then briefly out at the silent fog-shrouded dark before turning back to me.

" 'Do you know what is out there? I have told Sizenby here some of my theories, but not all, and you are unknown to me. Who are you?'

"I identified myself, but he didn't seem very interested.

" 'Of course, an intelligence officer. An intelli*gent* officer, a brilliant officer, is what I need. A second Lawrence, a Flinders Petrie, a Schliemann!'

"He took hold of my arm and shook it. 'Listen, Captain, and you too, Sizenby! I have made a discovery so fabulous that it will rock the world of science. I know why the Egyptians first came to Egypt! Yes, I know that, and all about their gods, too, where they got them. Because to begin, they had only one, you understand, only one!'

"Over his head I looked at Sizenby. It was clear that some tropical fever, heightened by exposure, hunger and fear had driven the fellow out of his head. This raving was utterly meaningless.

"In the silence, as Bruckheller gasped for fresh breath, we all heard a stick break. The clear sound was very close, somewhere beyond the firelight, but impossible to pin down as to direction. All of us tensed and I reached with one hand for the rifle I had laid down.

" 'Steady,' came Sizenby's voice. 'Steady now. It's just a noise. Don't give way!'

" 'No, don't give way,' mumbled Bruckheller. 'We are all dead men, but don't give way. You English are marvelous. None of us will live until morning! But don't give way!' His cackling laugh was a nasty parody of the real thing, and there was a note of hysteria or worse running through it.

"He plucked my sleeve. 'Listen, Captain, listen, Sizenby. I must tell you something. We are walking dead men, but I have to tell you. Someone should know what I have found, even if they don't live long.'

" 'All right, old chap, we're listening,' said Sizenby soothingly. His eyes nevertheless continued to watch the swirling mist which

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surrounded us and from which came an aura of silent menace, of malign observation. So did mine and the others'.

"As the silence grew and the fog seemed to form sinister shadow shapes, Bruckheller talked on and on, his voice low and grating, somehow hard to understand. I don't remember half what he said, but it went something like this:

"Many thousands of years earlier, a tribe of brown-skinned people, hunters and crude agriculturalists, had lived in this very area. But every effort they had made in their rise to higher levels of culture had been crushed and blocked. Their foe was not neighboring tribes but a malevolent species of creature unlike anything known elsewhere on the Earth, a bloodthirsty monster, or race of monsters, which preyed upon them ceaselessly. No weapons succeeding in killing the creatures, no prayers averted their wrath. Indeed, the hapless folk even made them (or it; the number was not clear) the tribal gods, but all in vain, for no sacrifice, human or animal, was sufficient.

"At last, despairing and decimated, the remnants of the people simply fled. Pursued by their awful oppressors, they somehow struggled north until at last in the great swamps of the White Nile the pursuing creatures were left behind. And the people, freed at last from a thousand years of nightmare, went on to become the ancestors of the ancient Egyptians.

"Mind you, it didn't sound as wild then as it no doubt appears now to you chaps here in the well-lit room of a building in a great city," said Ffellowes. "Please recollect that out there, in that cold mist, barely held off by the fire, knowing that *something* had got the missing *askari* (soldier), and moreover got him from out of our very midst, it was a very different matter. So that although we, Sizenby and I, were only giving Bruckheller half our attention, as it were, we were still impressed.

" 'The clues are all there,' he kept repeating in that very odd voice, 'if only one takes the trouble to read them, they are all there, in the hieroglyphs, in the religion, everywhere. But only I, of all those who have seen them, realized what they actually said.'

"Just then, any doubts we might have been entertaining about nocturnal visitors were abruptly dispelled. The mist had parted a little in front of the K.A.R. soldier on my left, the one doing sentry duty on one knee at this point. Two immense yellow eyes were reflected by the firelight, eyes with slit pupils, but nothing at all like a cat's, being long and pointed at the corners. They only appeared for a half second, but they were unpleasantly close to us. The soldier never fired, but

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Krock's reflexes were better, and he shot almost over my head, momentarily deafening me and filling the quiet night with the crash of his Winchester.

"In reply there came the most hideous cry I have ever heard. It was a coughing howl of volcanic rage, rising to a crescendo of sound and yet with a fearful shriek running quavering through it. It lasted for a moment and seemed to leave the very air tingling.

" 'That's no death cry,' said Sizenby grimly. 'That was simply annoyance. A wounded brute would have sounded quite different.'

" 'Yah,' agreed Krock, 'I know when I hit anyway. That one, he moves plenty quick, I can tell you.'

" 'You cannot hurt them,' rasped Bruckheller from my knee, where he still lay. He seemed to have got his wind back and he sounded almost amused. 'They are just as clever as you, you must realize, and they know very well what guns can do. They have lived here since the dawn of time, and never yet has anyone actually seen them and escaped.'

" 'Did you see one yourself?' Sizenby quickly asked, dropping to one knee beside me. 'Did you actually *see* them?'

"Bruckheller appeared disconcerted, as if his word had been challenged and seemed at a loss for speech. He gobbled something unintelligible and then muttered, 'I hardly got a look. They took my hunters—and I had two—one by one, they took them. I saw only a dark mass as they took the last one.'

" 'When was that and how did they let you get here, get to us? Come on, man, speak up!' Sizenby seemed to be following a thought and his voice was fierce. I had no idea what he wanted, but he was clearly in charge, so I shut up.

" 'How do I know?' snarled the Italian. 'Sometime yesterday afternoon, I think. I have been running and hiding, running and hiding. When I heard the shots I tried to get close, but always I would hear things moving. Why do you ask me all this?' His voice had taken on an unpleasant, grating whine, like that of a spoilt child who wishes to make excuses for a fault, but in some indefinable way even nastier.

" 'Just wondered, that's all,' said Sizenby in an absent tone. He was once again standing and watching the misty perimeter of visibility.

"Since that dreadful scream, no sound had come from out in the night. But now the far silence and the patter of drops of water from the bamboos were again broken. And once again it was the sound of running feet. Never very close and never very far away, the pad, pad of the runner came through

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the chill silence. First on one side of the circle then on the other. We had learned our lesson though, and we watched all sides.

"The sounds would cease at intervals, then commence again. The noises, indeed any sound in the bamboo forest, had a curious echoing quality, so that at times we seemed encompassed by legions of stealthy, padding feet, running on urgent and malignant errands. Yet at others there seemed only the one creature, running in the night, driven by some ancient and evil compulsion as if in search of a phantom prey.

"Somehow the night passed. As the grey dawn slowly widened our circle of vision, the invisible feet ceased. One moment they were active, the next gone, and a few birds began a desultory chirping deep in the ranks of the bamboo tufts.

"At length the area one could see clearly had widened to almost a hundred feet, and a hot circle in the eastern fog banks indicated the struggle of the sun to break through. We all relaxed a little and looked at one another for the first time.

" 'I sat up for the Tsavo man-eaters,' said Sizenby, passing his hand over his eyes, 'and at least once I heard them feeding on a Hindu railroad coolie twenty feet away from my tree. But it wasn't like this, I can tell you.' He looked grey and shriveled. Krock looked like the wrath of God too, and I could feel every nerve in my body aching from the constant strain of watching and waiting. The Negros, Somali, Kikuyu and Wanderobo were silent, a bad sign if one knew them. Only Sergeant Asoto spoke, stepping forward to point at my feet.

" 'Sirs, is this the man we hunt? He looks bad to me.'

"This simple remark made me and the others remember our quarry, the reason for all this incredible strain and the nexus of our search, almost forgotten due to the night's stealthy evil.

"Bruckheller had been sitting crouched at my feet, and as the sergeant spoke, he looked up, and I saw at once what the sergeant's rather basic English meant. I had thought he meant that Bruckheller was ill when he said 'looked bad.' But it was obvious that the words were meant absolutely literally. The Italian's face seemed to have suffered some indefinable change. The man's jaws appeared prolonged into a snout, almost as if he were thrusting his lower face forward, like an angry monkey's. And his eyes were narrowed in what looked like a damned vicious glare. He did indeed 'look bad.' He looked evil, if ever a man did; and as his eyes wandered over us, it was as though he were cataloguing us for some peculiar vengeance.

"Further, there was something

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markedly unpleasant about his posture. He was squatting but somehow gave the impression of a dangerous animal crouching to spring, rather than a human being seated or resting. I stepped back almost involuntarily, and Krock and Sizenby both raised their guns.

"'Stand away from him, Ffellowes,' said Sizenby sharply. 'I was afraid of this. It's one of the legends of the *Kerit.*'

"'By God, you said it!' said Krock. 'Just look at him!'

"'What's this?' I asked, as I turned around, baffled by the menace in their voices. All the blacks, faces set like flint were leveling rifles and spears at the silent Italian.

"'Why, it's got to him,' said Sizenby. 'Look at him, Ffellowes! He's not a man any longer. Can't you see that?'

"'Are you completely daft?' I shouted. 'This man is my prisoner. What the hell do you mean, not a man? Put those guns down! That's an order, damn it!'

"At this point Bruckheller sprang. I say 'Bruckheller', but I doubt the name was deserved any longer. In the light of what I next saw and heard, our companion of the night was frankly no longer anything that could be called human. The creature on the ground leapt with a snarl on my back and with a strength I wouldn't have believed possible seized me and held me as a shield between itself and the leveled rifles of the rest of the party. Helpless to move, I was neatly interposed against any bullets, as my captor backed rapidly away toward the nearest point of bamboo jutting into the rapidly clearing glade.

"I could not move, but I could hear, see and speak. What I heard was a noise made by the thing clutching my neck in an iron grip, a rumbling, chuckling growl. It was pleased with itself, like a circus animal which has somehow downed the trainer.

"What I saw were the agonized faces of all of our party, white and black, as they tried to get a point of aim from which to shoot, or throw in the Wanderobos' case, without hitting me. Some appeared frozen, others were moving but slowly, as one seems to in a nightmare.

"That is not all I saw. The mist was thinning, but in swirls and twists, not all at once. And behind the men, in a patch of clarity for one second, I saw something appear.

"Reddish, matted fur, upright posture, great gnarled and *hunched* shoulders, and surmounting them, I saw—Anubis!

"In one blinding instant I saw the great, pointed head, like a giant jackal's, the razor fangs bared in a snarl; and I realized the truth of Bruckheller's story, the hidden horror behind the

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beast-headed statues of ancient Egypt.

" 'For God's sake—behind you.' I managed to scream. It was Krock who caught my meaning fastest, and he whirled and fired in one motion, one arm cradling the rifle against his side and doing the firing as well. He could shoot, could Krock.

"Again from out of the mist we all heard that awful cry, like a coughing shriek which ran up the scale until it actually hurt one's ear. But this time there was a dreadful note of pain, so that the cry was half a wail. We all heard it. The second time, the Boer had hit his target.

"My own captor lost his head. What ghastly metamorphosis was working in him I will never know, but it was clear that a bond of some sort, psychic, spiritual perhaps, somehow connected him with that demon visage I had seen.

"At any rate, he hurled me on to the ground and throwing back his head (I was told this, I did not see it), he answered that horrible call with a perfect copy of it, slightly weakened but otherwise accurate. It was the last noise he ever made. Face down in the muck of that mountain meadow, I heard every rifle in our party explode simultaneously, some fired three or four times. Then, there was a great, ringing silence. I didn't move or even try to until I felt hands under my armpits and was hauled up to face the rest of the group.

"I turned then to look down at the late Dottore Guido Bruckheller. It was not a pleasant sight, since every bullet appeared to have hit, as well as two lion spears, but I felt then and still feel most strongly indeed that we had done the man an immense favor. It is not, I think, wise to speculate upon what he seemed well on the road to becoming. Whatever it was had no place in polite, or indeed human, society.

"Krock, Sizenby and I held a brief conference with Sergeant Asoto. The vote was unanimous. The men dug a rude grave, and after I searched the body, unpleasant but necessary, and found nothing, we buried it. Then Asoto addressed the troops in Swahili, briefly, forcefully and, to me, unintelligibly. At the end of his speech he asked a question. I could catch the inflection as well as the answer, *'Asente,'* which rang out.

" 'That means yes, does it not?' I asked the two whites.

" 'Quite so,' said Sizenby. 'They shot the foreign bwana because he was shooting at them. End of story. What they'll say in their own villages doesn't matter. It was made plain that all this had best be forgotten.'

" 'Yah,' added Krock, 'and a good thing too. Listen, I hear of

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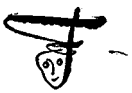
an English sea captain once who sees the sea serpent, the *groot meerschlang,* and goes to his cabin and tells the mate to log him as having been sick. He don't want people think he's crazy. Neither do we and neither do you, eh, Captain?'

"I looked around at the sunlit glade. The mist had vanished and a green touraco bird fluttered on the stalk of bamboo over the mound under which Bruckheller lay. My report would be the same, in essence, as the others. We came, he ran, he shot, we shot, *finis*. And there it rests to this day. You chaps are the first to ever hear the real story."

There was a long silence as we digested what we had heard. Then someone, not Williams—he was still numb—but another man, said hesitantly, "I guess it really is like the great sea serpent, isn't it, just too much to expect the world to believe?"

Ffellowes stared at him coldly, his blue eyes like ice. "Great sea serpent, indeed, my dear man? You don't know what you're talking about! That's a totally, I mean to say, *totally* different matter altogether. Why, there's nothing in the least unbelievable about the great sea serpent, as I myself can attest. Nothing like whatsoever, nothing!"

I felt good at once. The great sea serpent! Well, well, well.



WATCHING APOLLO

Snared by that harlot, our gravity's tug
We may yet observe them! in conjunction to earth
They whirl endless in their discovered orbit
Blind eyes fixed on instrumentation; this mirth

Is unkind to that strange composure,
But the scatology we need is happily provided
By three small receptacles cunningly placed
One by one in lockers after they have voided.

—BARRY MALZBERG

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Readers who have joined us in recent years know Joanna Russ's book reviews (which we run as often as we can get her away from her teaching duties at Cornell). They may not know that she has been writing with distinction in this field for at least ten years or that her first novel, PICNIC ON PARADISE, *won a Nebula award nomination last year. Her first story for us in some time—and the longest ever—is part of a new novel,* AND CHAOS DIED, *which will be published shortly as an Ace special. The novelet stands quite well on its own and is the most convincing telepath story we have seen in a long time.*

INITIATION

by Joanna Russ

ONE

HIS NAME WAS JAI VEDH.

There was some Hindu in the family, way back, but he did not look it, being yellow-haired with blue eyes and a dark yellow beard. He was a desperate, quiet, cultured, and well-spoken man. He was still young when his business required him to take a trip, and so for the first time he traveled up off the surface of old Earth—on which every place was then like every other place—into the vacuum that is harder than the vacuum in any machine or toy or kitchen sink.

On the third day, alone among thirty-five hundred, he felt a vacuum inside himself, a spot like the spot on a graph that makes the lights jump around and up and down or wink on and off or trace a dying curve to the bottom of the page, a spot barely contained by the strong walls of his chest that were so used to swimming, walking, wrestling, to struggling in bed. He endured the sensation, finding it not new. On the seventeenth day it got worse, he felt them pulling at each other through the walls; on the nineteenth day he threw himself against one of the portholes. He was taken to sick bay. They told him, as they shot him full of sedatives, that the space between the stars was full of light, full of mat-

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ter, an atom in a cubic yard, and so not such a bad place after all. He was filled with peace; the vacuum outside was trustworthy.

Then the ship exploded.

He was lying on his back, one knee thrust up; he was looking at the side of an abyss made of grass-tangles and blades and someone was holding him up.

"Coward," said a woman's voice. Someone pulled back his head.

"Come on now!" said another voice. "Come on now, I pulled you out of that," and turning around, he saw the face of the Captain, probably, for he had seen that idiotic face somewhere in the past, on top of something equally idiot—

"—alone," said Jai Vedh.

"Come *on*!"

And the person shook him.

"You're full of the stuff," said the Captain, "full of it. Come on," and pulling Jai to his feet, he began dragging him around in a circle, sweating under his weight. There was no third person present.

"Someone else called me," said Jai, and then he stopped, stumbling but on his own feet; there were trees, a lake through them, a path, hills on the left.

"Where's the thing we escaped in?" he said. "Where are we?"

"On the ground," said the Captain. "Where we can stay until we die of old age. The motor blew out in the woods. March!"

"Damned civilian coward," he added under his breath.

But his voice was not the first voice.

The path led nowhere. It went around the lake and returned. They tried it the first day, again on the second, even on the third, until the Captain declared that it could not have been made by anything human.

"Human beings are not particularly rational," said Jai Vedh apologetically, his back to a tree trunk and his knees under his chin. "I've made many paths like that myself. I'm a decorator."

"A pleasure garden?" said the other man, and he strode off down the path again, only to reappear an hour later. The sun shone low through the trees; the lake glittered brilliantly through the tree trunks: pale dazzle and bars of fire.

"A professional job," said Jai.

"Placeaworship," said the other.

"Yes, calculated," said Jai. "I'd stake my life on it."

"You *are* staking your life on it, buddy."

"I know my job."

"What a job! Civilian job."

"I make a living; do I ask you—"

"Shiftless!"

A barefoot woman appeared on the path leading to the lake. Jai,

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first to see her, scrambled to his feet; but the Captain launched himself down the path with a roar. The woman waited and then stepped aside. She said:

"I am not going any."

Jai saw fingers flashing among cards, picking out words, *yes, that's it*—

"I am not going any where," she said. Then she said, "Galactica, yes?" Her words were perfect, slightly separated. "Sorry. I am not used." She stepped toward Jai, twitched down the skirt of her short, brown, sleeveless shift, and sat down abruptly on the grass, crossing her knees. "I'm not used to talking this at all," she finally said. "My hobby. You fit well, yes?"

"Galactica!" said the Captain.

(*Ordinary,* thought Jai, *dark, unobtrusive, hair hacked off, nothing but part of a crowd.*)

"Listen," the Captain was saying, "I want you to tell me—"

"You," she said to Jai, laying a hand on his arm, "you, I like the way you fit together, mm?" raising her voice in a little chirrup at the end, like a bird's tail, impudent, sleek, leaning towards him with eyes half shut, hair blown across her mouth, her skull and beating veins showing somehow through her face, all the bones wired together. His mind closed instantly. "I understand," she said. "Yes. All right. Come on, I take you to your machine," and rising to her feet, quite seriously, "I am very sorry it is broke."

When they reached the escape capsule, there were people all around it, some sitting near it, one sitting on it. Some stood around on the grass or under the trees; no one turned or spoke. Children hung upside down from the branches of trees. No one wore clothes.

"Naked primitives," said the Captain.

These people, thought Jai, *have the most expressive backs in the world,* and from the grass at his feet there sprang a shiver of twitching, as if somebody or something were shrugging back into his clothes, the bearded young man who had sat on the escape machine, for example; shrugging back into a leather jacket, a toga, a djellabah, a cape, a sheet, a gaberdine. The woman, who had darted into the capsule, came out carrying a load of books; she dumped them on the ground and smiled a dazzling smile; she announced:

"Do you know how much time I have spent in here? I have spent days in here. I am exhausted."

"Days?" exclaimed the Captain.

"Why not?" she said, shrugging. "Besides, I came here last night; that is what I mean by spending days in here. Besides, I don't mean days; I mean a long time."

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"Hours are not days," said Jai Vedh.

"Oh, no, they're not," said she. "You're clever," and with another delightful smile, she settled to the ground and began sorting out the books, still looking Jai straight in the face.

"You seemed to have learned to speak—" said the Captain.

"Oh, I only got better," she said. "I told you it was my hobby," she continued, diving down into the books, "and so it was; it was my avocation. I'm a doctor." Smiling strangely, she fastened her gaze on one book, then tossed the book on a pile. She bent down and gathered them all in her arms.

Tsung-ka! she said, and immediately a group of children (they might have been dropped from the trees themselves, they appeared so neatly and suddenly) took them all from her and ran off, each in a different direction. She picked up from the grass, which was not exactly green, a book covered with shed autumn leaves, heart-shaped leaves like the leaves of the ailanthus, but oddly stippled green, red, purple. She picked up the book and brushed off the leaves and said, thoughtfully looking through the pages:

"This is a grammar. Strange. I wonder why it was included. At any rate, it's amusing, isn't it? I think we will teach everyone this language."

"Who is we?" said Jai tensely, before the Captain could speak.

"Everyone," she said, surprised. "Who else?"

"You have copies of that book, of course," Jai broke in.

"Why—no," said the woman.

"Then you will duplicate it," said Jai.

"No—no, of course not," said the woman, moving back. "We can't. We have not got machinery."

"Then you can't teach everyone that language," said Jai, "can you? Only a few people, because you must teach it to them from one book."

"Why—yes. That is perfectly logical," said she.

"And yet you will teach everyone?"

"Ah—we will not," she said, and suddenly dropping the book, she added irrelevantly, "It's going to rain," and raced around the escape capsule, to disappear within the forest.

"What in the name of Everything is going on?" said the Captain.

"Everything," said Jai Vedh. And he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"Books!" said the Captain, somewhat more steadily. "Books, *not tapes*. There can't be three dozen in the ship's library, they're that rare. Who puts *real books* in an escape capsule?"

"The same person who put you

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and me in it together," said Jai Vedh.

"Someone in the ship!" exclaimed the Captain.

"No. Yes. Someone here, someone there. The planet itself. That woman. I don't yet know who's running whom."

"You're mad," said the Captain, quite unnecessarily. He climbed inside the capsule and was out a moment later. "There's nothing else in there. The webbing, the motors, the usual drugs. Food."

"Can we use it?" said Jai Vedh.

"No, the shell's cracked. Wide open."

"Would it leak air?"

"An understatement," said the Captain. "The only thing that seals is the door."

"Then," said Jai, "I am going to live behind that sealed door. And I suggest you do the same."

"You *are* mad," said the Captain solemnly.

"My dear, overconfident friend," said Jai, pointing to the grass, "take a look at that book. You may even pick it up. It's a Chinese grammar, not Galactica, that's the first thing; and in the second place, it's not the new Chinese or even the various intermediate alphabets; it's the good old Mandarin—half a million separate written symbols. That's what our little savage recognized as a grammar the moment she picked it up. That's what's so 'amusing' and that's what everyone's going to learn. It's my book. I brought it along in my personal baggage. It took me six months to learn to read the title page. There's not a word of Galactica in it. Or anything else but Mandarin Chinese."

It was the Captain who locked the door.

They lay side by side on the separate bunks, in the white, fluorescent light that had surrounded them both since they were born. There was hardly room to stand. Against the one small window Jai could see the Captain's profile. Jai thought idly:

I wish I knew what it feels like to be a man who loves a woman.

The Captain stirred.

Even with this piece of dead bully-beef, I know what it feels like to be a woman who wants a man. The mischief of it! The viciousness! I could ride him like a toy. Take it hard, work like hell, flare up for five seconds—and then, rolling over, covered with sweat, feed forever and ever off the look in the poor bastard's humiliated eyes.

"May I have a cigarette?" said the Captain.

If it were worth it.

"De-nicotinized?" said the Captain abruptly, sitting up.

"Yes, if you'll take a light from mine," said Jai Vedh, and the two men sat, knees touching, transferring the fire from one cigarette to the other.

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"Goddamn egg," said the Captain.

"Calm down." *I'm not going to commit an assault upon your person, blockhead.*

"I'm going out," and the Captain got up, bent to avoid hitting the ceiling, sat down, put his head in his hands, and lay down again.

"I won't touch you," said Jai tiredly, "not even in your sleep," and shutting his eyes, he saw a long procession of women appear in front of him under the fluorescent lights, all naked and all the wrong shape: so weak that to touch them was to hurt them, so strong that they could kill. They floated up to him and burst over his belly like popped balloons. Pale. Treacherous. Unnatural. Mindless.

Thunder rumbled outside the hull.

"I can't—" said the Captain suddenly, half audibly, into the wall.

"Can't what?"

"Shut up, mister."

"Can't stay here?" said Jai.

"I can stay here alone," said the Captain thickly. "I can throw you out."

"Try it."

"Look, civvy," said the Captain, "I've eighty pounds over you and no soft-headed—"

"Is that what you call us now?"

"Get out of here, mister!"

"Is it anger now?" said Jai, doubling into a corner of the bunk, "is it now?" ready to spring.

"Or is it my baby-blue eyes?"

As the Captain threw himself forward, as Jai's sandal caught him in the face, a sheet of water broke into the stainless steel egg, knocking them both down, making the room rock like a cannon. The outside lit up, ultraviolet. In the doorway, gleaming with phosphor or rain, stood the woman, with ostrich plumes on her head, her breasts, and tied to her feet, around her wrists and neck something that blurred like diamonds. She reached out and caught Jai by the wrist, pulling him out through the door of the capsule. Rain hit him in the face; he slipped in the wet grass and the sky lit up again. He tried to pull away but someone caught his other hand, first forward, then back. They were dancing. Another flash of lightning lit the field from horizon to horizon: a carnival, an inferno, a Hell's-mouth, a plain of grotesque masks and robes. He felt himself thrown from one circle of dancers to the next. As the storm passed, the dancers dropped off one by one, some to lie in the wet and some to roll in it, like dogs. He found himself laughing and staggering, with his arms around her, then slid to the ground to roll over in it and sit up, still laughing. Thunder walked in the distance. At the margin of the

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lake, half in and half out of the water, a round dance was trampling the shore into shapelessness, demons, trees, skulls, a naked figure with an elongated head. They heaved forward, wordlessly, jerked and heaved back. They looked exhausted or dead.

Jai Vedh put his hands over his eyes. He got to his feet, almost helpless with nausea, and began wandering painfully towards home. Some dancers had fallen out of the dance and lay on the ground; some were on their hands and knees, whispering at nothing. Two were playing cards. He beat on the door of the steel egg until he thought his strength was gone; then the flooded field tilted and abruptly the sound of the rain stopped.

He was inside. The bedding was dry but still cold. The light blinded him. The rain sound came back, the Captain, holding both Jai's hands in his, jumped to a crouch, facing the door.

A chanteuse from the old Folies Bergère, her feet and ankles caked with mud, her ostrich plumes draggled with mud and rain. She hung on the side of the doorway, eyes shut, dead with fatigue. The metal door-latch began to say in a high, thin, unoiled voice:

Sorry . . . Too tired. Easier to talk directly.

"My God, my God, my God!" moaned the Captain.

My apologies . . . Frontal attack . . . too much stress for you . . . try again, next week . . . next month . . . you'll forget.

She began to bend at the knees.

Weech dukkur! screamed the door-latch. *Which ducker! Whach doctor! Witch doctor!*

Psychiatrist, it enunciated clearly. The woman disappeared.

Dimly aware of the terrified man who was holding his hands, Jai Vedh plunged immediately into sleep.

TWO

So they came down in the escape capsule the next morning, and the Captain shook hands unaffectedly with the young woman in the simple brown dress who had been delegated to welcome them. She was the community doctor.

"A lost colony?" he said.

"A lost colony," she said.

"How long does it take the grass to turn this color?" said Jai Vedh (his idle curiosity).

"Months," she said.

They walked past the lake, talking idly about what could happen to a colony in a hundred and fifty years. The young woman carried nothing and her feet were bare; she climbed the hill with hardened, bare soles, stepping on twigs and pebbles, not even bothering to pick her way among the

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rocks. At the first stone hut above the lake she stopped for a moment to show them that there was no door, only a doorway—"because the climate is so dry," she said.

Inside there was a running stream. On a flat-topped rock sat an unglazed crockery dish with a wick swimming in yellow water, but the only light came from the doorway.

"This hut is very old," she said. "It was my great-grandmother's." She pointed to the dish. "That's oil. We trade that."

"And for heat?" said the Captain.

"It's never cold," she said.

"Young woman," began the Captain.

"I know, I know," she interrupted, suddenly ducking round the doorway into the sun. "You want to meet our leaders. We haven't got any. Also, you must go back to your ship and cannibalize the motor for a radio. You have trite ideas." She swung by one hand, into visibility and out of it; she added, "If you wait, we'll bring you the equipment *we* came down with."

"*What?*" said the Captain.

"Our equipment," she said. "If you work hard, you can make your ship over in six months and not wait the rest of your life for a rescue. You would find that dull I think."

"And you never rescued yourselves!" said Jai Vedh suddenly. "Because you didn't want to. Am I right?"

"You would guess eggs if you saw the shells," said the woman. "Come on," and she led them out of the stone hut on to the hillside. The Captain was stumbling in the loose shale at the crown of the hill.

"Doctor," said Jai Vedh, "you're the doctor. Am I sick?"

"Very," said the woman dryly. "In the head. Both of you."

"Then cure me," said Jai Two, the one who noticed, and he watched intently as she sat down cross-legged on the pile of loose rock, as her eyes shut and her head jerked forward. She opened her eyes and got up an instant later.

"I can't," she said matter-of-factly. "This is Olya's house."

"They're gone to hell," said the Captain. "Trances and black magic." She paid no attention.

"Do you hear? You're decadent," said Jai One, who, almost agreed.

"I think you are rude," said the woman after a moment's silence, and as they came to "Olva's house," she grabbed him by the wrist and headed through the doorway. "I know what it means to cannibalize; it means to eat something," she whispered.

"But tell me, please, what does it mean—*radio?*"

Olya, the one who spoke Slove-

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nian, was out; so was the one who spoke German and the brothers who spoke Chinese. She went from house to house in the heat of the afternoon, always telling them who lived there, and when the houses above the lake all proved to be empty, they followed her down along the shore and up the back of the hill. The afternoon got quieter and quieter. An insect or a saw sounded in the distance. Everything in the place was small, from the trees to the paths to the lake itself; it was like looking out over somebody's back yard, and the whole place shivered in the heat as if it were about to disappear.

Jai realized he had been sitting and staring at his own feet for some time. The heat was making him drowsy. He shook his head and heard, coming along the curve of the lake, a faint *toink-toink* like the call of a bird. Nothing moved. The sun's reflection burned on the lake, the shale sweated, the houses stood and made shadows; and then in a blast of light, in a shrill whistle, the fabric of creation ripped from sky to rock. A naked twelve-year-old boy came out from behind one of the houses, tapping a gourd against a stone and whistling.

Toink-toink! and he stopped. The woman asked him a question.

He answered expressionlessly in two syllables.

She asked him another question.

He answered the same way.

And another.

He seemed to imitate a cat.

"I am sorry," she said, turning to the men. "He says Olya is out hunting something, and the Chinese brothers are making pottery. He says the devil has entered into everyone and driven them all to the four corners of the earth in a relentless rage for novelty, from which only he is exempt, to wander in this deserted village, producing beautiful sounds and listening to the catabolism of the rocks."

"He's quite a poet," said the Captain heavily.

"He thinks he is," said she. "He is very sarcastic. Will you come in, please? It's getting hot," and the two of them got up and went into the nearest hut, dislodging fragments of glittering shale. Jai got up.

"Tell me," he said to the boy, "do you speak Galactica?"

"Sure," said the boy. "Black hair. Sit. Up and down."

Jai made a face. He turned to go but a dry, erratic clattering broke out behind him; he turned back to see the little boy jumping up and down in a wild war dance on the loose rocks, throwing himself from side to side with his head bobbing. Then the boy stopped.

"That's Olya," he said. He came closer, suddenly timid, and

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without looking at Jai, he put out one finger and touched him gently on the arm; he said, "There, there."

"Where is everyone?" Jai said sharply.

The boy looked unhappy.

"If you're putting something over on us," said Jai, "by God, you'll be sorry!" He stepped forward with what he hoped was a threatening gesture, and the boy, whose eyes had unaccountably filled with tears, turned and ran for the nearest trees.

"Lost in this place with a fool military man," said Jai.

A small, naked girl pattered out of the hut and past him down the hill. Another child ran through the doorway and around the back. And another. He broke into a run.

The inside of the hut was full of them.

The chattering stopped as soon as he came in. The children had frozen in wonder, except for two still kicking in the pile of leaves, but as these saw him, they too fell quiet. Someone sneezed. A tall woman, a beauty with a glossy black braid around her head and a dark mole on her upper lip, magnificently buxom and with nothing on but a skin skirt tied around her waist, darted after the two children in the leaves, and snatching one under each arm, shot them out the door past Jai Vedh. She chased around the room and ejected the others, including a staring toddler to whom the Captain was holding out a piece of cracker. The last child out, she wiped her forehead, took her big breasts in her hands and, leaning forward, laid them on the stone table. Next to her the colony doctor in the brown dress was hardly a woman at all. "I'm amazed you didn't hear us all come in," said the woman in the brown dress to Jai.

"This is Olya," she added.

"That is Evne," said Olya. She straightened up, dusted her hands against her hips, and went over to the pile of leaves in the back of the hut. She stuck her hand in and drew something out; coming back to them, she knelt and opened it to show a salamander on her palm: plump hand, tapered fingers, turned wrist.

"Really, I am not a pet doctor," said Evne, irritated. Olya shrugged, a spectacular sight. The Captain coughed self-consciously.

"All right, give it me," said Evne then, and holding the little beast in her hand, she suddenly collapsed forward into a trance, her head on her knees, the hand holding the salamander still carefully up in the air. The Captain jerked his head towards the doorway of the hut, and after he and Jai were outside, he said:

"Goddamn it, I don't want to watch two grown women practicing black magic over a frog!"

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"Salamander," said Jai automatically.

"These people were too lucky," the Captain said, his lips tightening, "too lucky, civilian. They didn't have to work. While you were gone, I found out a few things. Everything's around for the taking. Nothing's any trouble. If it rains you get wet, that's all. Sit a man on his ass with nothing to do but eat and the first thing that goes is his mind. I was talking to our little doctor while you were outside and the only thing that keeps her patients from dying is that she doesn't have any. And the men are no better. 'What does he do?' 'He's picking wildflowers today.' 'What does he do?' 'He's watching the squirrels.' Jesus Christ!"

"Yes . . . yes, you're right," said Jai Vedh helplessly.

"To think of a *man*—" muttered the Captain, and then, "pray, civilian, that they've got that equipment and that we can use it. I'm going to the ship. I'll meet you there before sundown."

"Yes," said Jai Vedh, and turning aside from the path down the hill, he walked in among the trees. Too much like a garden, everything smooth. Even the creepers and the ground trash cushiony under your feet. Perhaps it was a human garden, an experiment someone was trying, perhaps someone collected children, or bred men for types, or watched with an indulgent chuckle as two pet women knelt over a pet salamander . . .

But language is work, thought Jai. *Language is hard work. A hundred and fifty years without records or broadcasts and a colony will develop at least a regional accent.*

But they have no accent.

And Doctor Evne, with no patients and no medicine, has at the same time a polished, literary style. The catabolism of the rocks. A relentless rage for novelty . . .

Galactica is my hobby, said something near him or around him or under him. He could not remember where he had heard it before. He stood still with his fists clenched, trying to remember everything: the noise the children must have made, going into the hut—you couldn't shut up toddlers!—and why was the "magic" so commonplace and so inexplicable? *And that little boy,* he found himself saying to himself, *that ultra-sophisticated, poetical little Nero!*

There was a squeaky whistle and the boy himself stepped out from behind a tree, gourdless and stoneless. His reddish-brown hair hung below his shoulders. It had not been bleached by the sun. He was not tanned. Jai stepped forward, took him by one shoulder.

"Where did you come from?" he said quietly. "Is there a trap door behind that tree?"

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The boy said nothing, only looked up (big, innocent, dark eyes) and tried to pry the fingers off his arm. Jai tightened his grip.

"Is there," said Jai, with a softness whose hatred surprised even himself, "a *city* under that tree?"

The boy said nothing. Jai let him go. The boy—who was standing on stubble and broken twigs—began to rub his shoulder; he gave a yelp of surprise as Jai grabbed one of his feet and pulled it up. The sole was as thick and hard as horn. The boy had never worn shoes in his life.

"Child of nature," said Jai Vedh, half venomously, half dully. "Yes, child of nature. Leave me alone," and turning, he began to climb towards the path. Halfway there he heard a rustling, and the boy leapt in front of him; his attitude mimicking Jai's, his face an absurd caricature of hate, teeth showing and eyes completely crossed.

I am ready to—thought Jai, cursing, *you will drive me to*—

"War!" shrieked the boy wildly. "War! War! War!" and capering madly around, he at length settled against Jai's right side, where he wound his naked arm around the man and leaned his head on the latter's shoulder.

Jai Vedh burst into tears.

Pushing the boy from him, he sat down on the path and gave himself up to it, not gratefully but in hard fits; he had never given himself up to anything before and did not want to. After a while he felt himself poked in the ribs with a twig which made him laugh and cough. He felt the silky tingle of child's flesh, the hot breath in his ear saying "rah tah tah tah TAH!" He made himself recover himself. He got up and started along the path with the boy hanging on to his arm. "Stop poking me," said Jai. "And what's your name? I can't call you Nature Baby."

"Nothing."

"Well then, Nothing, how old are you?"

The boy made a sound like steam escaping from a bad valve.

"Mm hm. And how many of you people are there?"

"*Ftun,*" said the boy.

"Very informative."

"Sure *Ftun* is number."

"How much number, three?" said Jai. The boy looked at him oddly.

"Many many?" said Jai, indulgently.

"Yes," said the boy.

"*Very* many many?"

"Eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven.

"Not large," the boy added carefully, "but optimum, they tell me." He slipped his arm from Jai's and dashed off into the trees. *Fool! Fool!* Jai cried to himself in horror, *You fool!* and ran after him.

But the boy was gone.

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Back at the ship the Captain was sitting on the ground with his lap full of small, transparent plastic plates. There was a tangle of silver wire near him and a wire cutter, but he did not appear to be using these; he was balancing the plates one on top of the other like a house of cards and plugging into their edges jewels, boxes, rings, little blue cubes. He was making a radio. When he noticed Jai, he vaulted to his feet, knocking over what he had been doing. It fell on its side: rigid.

"Good God, man," said the Captain, "what happened?"

"A prime number," said Jai Vedh. "Eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven. Can't be factored."

"Are you cracking again, mister?" said the Captain.

"No," said Jai. "I've been told a number. It's not a round number. Not in our decimal system. Not in the duodecimal system. I tried everything up to nineteen. Also, I think it's a prime number."

"Mister—" began the Captain.

"Eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven is *Ftun*. I give you my own, improper, accented version. One syllable. That's a large number to have a name of its own. Unless it's a round number. Or an estimate. And it's not. In what sort of language, in what sort of mind, military man, does every number up to more than ten thousand have its own name?"

"So?" said the Captain.

"This colony is more than a hundred and fifty years old. If it *is* a colony. And that thing you're making is going to broadcast about as well as a Christmas tree."

"Why, civilian?"

"Because they don't want us to leave. They don't want anyone to know."

"Know what?" asked the Captain. "We'll leave by Christmas." He looked up, grinning. "The three hundred and fifty-ninth day of the three hundredth year A.B. Put it into six calendars: Mohammedan, Jewish, Indian, Gregorian and so forth, all different. But still Christmas." He grinned even wider. "Two syllables!"

"You stupid, stupid bastard!" said Jai Vedh, leaning over the radio. "Can't you see—"

"Don't touch that," said the Captain, in a surprisingly emotional voice. He got to his feet. "And don't be so impressed, mister, with—*little boys*."

Jai hit him, as he had been taught (for he had many hobbies) solidly under the jaw, snapping the man's head back. The Captain staggered. He lunged at Jai and Jai helped him over on to his back, wrenching his arm for good measure. He watched the big man stagger, wishing he himself were not in sandals; his feet slipped in the thongs and something, some chronic humiliation, weighted on him, hurt him, made him slow.

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He couldn't take his eyes off the Captain's boots. Now that the first round was over. The Captain was circling carefully, face very serious, shuffling in the leaves, crushing them, crushing the grass. *Now God help me!* thought Jai.

You're the best student I've had, but you'll never win a real fight . . .

He woke, excruciatingly nauseated, lying on his side with two faces above him that moved together and jumped apart as if in a bad mirror, two Hottentots, with twin pale-brown faces, flat noses, identical black beards. Both put out a hand, both spoke, "Shut your eyes," and the hands came down, one on top of another, on him. His nausea ebbed. "All right," said the voice quietly, "open your eyes," and Jai Vedh opened them to see one face —with its aggressively jutting beard and eyes like balls of pitch— inches from his own. A hard, thin, Negro face and all business. "Sit up," the man said, and he helped Jai to manage it. He was wearing a monk's black robe. From across the clearing a woman came walking; it was Olya. The man in the monk's robe rose, and it seemed to Jai for a moment that Olya's skirt dropped to the ground, that the man's robe melted away, that he had wound his arms strongly around her while she, cradling his head in her arms, shivered amorously, swooned, and rolled up her eyes. The vision passed. The couple stood in front of Jai Vedh.

"How do you feel?" said the man.

"Shaky," said Jai.

"He should sleep," said Olya, with kind interest, "and wake up in time for the play, yes?"

The man nodded. "Sleep," he said. He gestured behind Jai. "I've put your friend under for at least four hours. We will see you tonight." And they walked across the clearing and into the woods. Jai lay down, very tired. He thought of Olya. As he began to drift off, Olya—in his dream—came to lie down beside him, dressed only in her long hair. She stretched out her arms and opened her knees, offering to him her sparkling black eyes, her hair, her teeth, all that temperament between shoulder and thigh.

Go away, he said. *You know what I am.*

I know better, said dream-Olya, embracing him. He plunged into her as into a storm cloud, terrified, sweating, suffocated, as she grew to the size of a mountain goddess, with the fatal lightning of the heights playing around her and killing trees right and left.

Why, Olya, he said, *you have a black mole over your lip.*

That is not I! she answered in her strange, slightly hysterical contralto. *No—ah! oh!—that is my friend, Evne!*

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And so for a moment before he slept, the woman who received the climax of his pleasure was Evne: delicate, flushed, and shivering.

My dear, she said. *Oh, my dear, my dear.*

At sunset, Jai left the Captain —who remembered nothing— bent over his radio like an ape over a needle.

Jai turned at the edge of the forest to see the radio, like an improbable parlor trick, grown higher than the Captain's head. The Captain was reaching up to place something on it. Shadows stretched across the clearing.

He's worshiping it, thought Jai, and barefoot in the warm evening air, his sandals hanging around his neck, he turned into the darkness between the trees.

He saw no one until the moon came out. He wandered through the woods in the dark for a while, and then went down to the lake and sat there because the water took its colors from the evening sky. It got very dark. The stars were much denser and much brighter than those he was used to. He got up abruptly, sensing some visual confusion at his back; for a moment he saw nothing and then a kind of faint aurora appeared at the horizon. He thought: *there's going to be a moon.*

Not knowing why, he got up and began walking around the lake, then into the woods and up a hill. Bending down, he picked up a pebble, then dropped it and watched it roll away downhill until it faded into the ground. He could see his own feet clearly. The stars, oppressive now to a city-dweller, hung silently blazing over his head, so thick that they almost blotted out the night sky. He parted the tree branches ahead of him like a veil, walked out into a clearing, through the trees into another, and so by a succession of rooms into a sort of natural amphitheater he could have sworn he had missed during the day. The walls were massive and quicksilver, ready to topple. The last stars turned into pinheads and disappeared. The sky, cloudless from horizon to horizon, was a pale, deep, regular blue. Something down at the bottom of the amphitheater caught the light and flashed it brilliantly; he turned to see the source, and there above the tops of the trees swam something broad and deep, now a globe, now a flat sheet of white, now a globe again. It was three times the size of Earth's moon— and full. It gave him vertigo.

He saw that there was someone in the amphitheater not twenty yards away, and waved, feeling relieved; there was no answering sign, but someone else moved silently on the edge of the field of vision, and then someone else,

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and someone else. The amphitheater was full of people.

He thought, *They walked in while I was staring at the sky like a fool,* and knew that he was wrong.

An old man suddenly next to Jai, skinny and stubble-chinned with white hair reaching to his shoulders, put down the last of the plums he was eating, and as if Jai's gasp were some kind of signal, leapt to his feet and threw himself down the slope—end over end like a diver, and all of it in the air. At the bottom of the theater he continued to spring around the level circle in backward somersaults, and then—as if the strength he had been using had suddenly deserted him—modulated into the trembling and graceful movements of old age. The whole place sighed. Placing one hand aginst the back of his neck for support, the old man dropped his head forward and stretched it back; shaking with effort, he kneeled down and got up, and then without the slightest look at anyone, walked to the side of the amphitheater and sat down.

Then someone began to sing. It was music built from a table of random numbers and full of unexpected stops. Near the end of the song the singer went up to the top of his or her range and screamed violently for several minutes, coming down finally with an exquisitely seductive intonation and ending with a kind of blat.

Nothing happened for thirty minutes.

Then the colors in the amphitheater began to go bad, and the air in the place seemed to blow a little hot and a little cold. The people on either side of Jai swayed lightly in their seats, first down, then up; he thought it was community dancing until he felt the blood rush to his head. The walls of the amphitheater tilted steeply up, while all the crowd fell forward; then the amphitheater deepened into a tube while the people fell down. Community dancing. The merest mild playfulness with the planet's gravitational field.

The merest mild playfulness . . .

Telepathy. Telekinesis. Teleportation. Telehallucination. Teleperception. Telecontrol. Telecide? He thought:

Everyone's watching me.

I must get back to the ship.

He was standing among the fringes of the woods, half hysterical, trying to strap his sandals on one-handedly, with the other hand clasped idiotically around his head to prevent his thoughts from leaking out, when somebody's hot hand grabbed his, and looking down, he saw a small girl of nine or ten holding on to him. She was very like Evne and she wore nothing but a fancy, tucked kerchief. She said:

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"Mister, stay?"

He remained silent, finishing his sandals and pulling himself away. She held on to his sleeve and followed him stumblingly into the woods.

"Please?" she said. She had fallen down.

Jai Vedh thought thoughts of murder.

"I can talk," said the little girl. There was a moment's silence.

"Actually," she continued with sudden fluency, "it's because they're *grownups*. *Grownups* are *horrid*. They say 'Oh, he'll be all right.' They haven't the slightest *compassion*. This is because they can whatchamacallit. I can't whatchamacallit because I'm nine. I can talk, however, as you see. Now *you* say something."

"Good God!" said Jai, between horror and laughter.

There was another moment of silence.

"Actually," said the girl vehemently, "it is *all your fault*. You were in such an emotional disorder that it gave me a headache. I simply *had* to follow you. I am Evne's daughter, my name is Evniki, that means little Evne, and I am parthenogenetic. I am not haploid, however," added Evniki, a little more mildly. "I have complete genetic material. I'm a duplicate; self-fertilized. Mother is a genetic surgeon."

She got to her feet.

"While you gather your thoughts," she said, dusting herself off, "I will tell you more. I am nine and can feed myself, so I don't live with anyone. I cannot notice thoughts yet, of course, but I can read feelings and move about and tell where people are and so forth. Anyone can do that. If the infants could do anything else, we'd all be murdered in our beds."

Jai stared.

"I'm nine," went on this unstoppable little girl, "but actually I'm fifteen. I've slowed myself down. Of course I have to let myself grow up before I beome a permanent dwarf, but I think I'll wait another year. I wish to develop intellectually. Besides, I have already chosen my life's work. I am very verbal. I will go into the verbal arts and be considered esoteric. Do you feel better now?"

"Yes," said Jai, surprising himself.

"Good," said Evniki, and she smiled a dim, thoughtful, un-nine-ish smile. She pressed herself against his side. "Do you feel better now?"

"Are all the children in this place afflicted with twining creeperism?" said Jai dryly, trying to detach her. She slid back in under his hands.

"Don't you," she cooed, *"like* little girls?"

"No!" said Jai, thoroughly exasperated.

"Oh, every man does," said Evniki, rubbing her knee against

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his. "And every little girl likes men. You can't push me away or you'll hurt me."

"Stop it, Evniki," said Jai severely. "Just because I'm laughing—"

"You're not laughing," said Evniki softly. "You forget; I can tell." Her face changed. "You're stirring," she said dreamily. "I can feel it, it's so good."

"Evniki, don't tease—"

"It's really happening," said the child unnoticing. "How amazing! Anything will draw you, because you are so shut up. Now I'm beginning to glow in your mind like a little candle. Oh, make me glow, I love to watch myself glow . . ."

"Evne," whispered Jai in horror, "if I were to take you right now—"

"Evne," murmured the little girl, gliding out of his reach, "is my *mother's* name! Faithless man!" and she disappeared into the woods.

The moon had gone down; the light between the trees was beginning to fail. He knelt with his head in his hands. The adults (he thought) were gods and the children monsters. He lay down. In the dark, a daisy at the foot of the nearest tree began to take on the unmistakable aura of Evne.

He leapt to his feet and tore a branch from the tree, prepared to defend his life. He said:

"This is not you! This is a metaphor my mind is making up, to account for the things you put in my head!"

The daisy went back to being a plant.

He lay down and went to sleep, finally, and in his dream the daisy hovered over his head like a vampire and told him everything.

Olya was kneeling and dipping her hands in the inside stream; Jai had his back to one of the inside corners of the stone hut and the Captain's sedation rifle across his knees, and the Captain—who had not been able to get it back was sitting on the flat-topped rock with an embarrassed smile.

"Infants," said Jai tightly, shifting his grip on the rifle, "cannot do anything because if they did, we'd all be murdered in our beds. By nine one can read feelings and control one's glandular secretions to slow one's own growth. One can locate people then and move around instantaneously but not read thoughts. That's for grownups. Grownups can do everything. You can transport yourself from place to place instantaneously, you can levitate, you can perceive and manipulate objects at a distance, from what size I don't know, but it goes down to the microscopic—no, the sub-microscopic. You play with the wavelength of light. You play with gravity."

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"I play with lights?" said Olya, smiling. "I play with gravity? I don't have a ship. I don't have colored lights, yes?"

"I don't think," said Jai carefully, settling into his corner, "that any teleport would care to materialize inside a stone wall."

"I've been hearing this," said the Captain between his teeth, "since—"

"A little plant told me," said Jai, and he addressed to her one unspoken question: HOW MUCH?

"Do I have machines?" said Olya angrily. "Do I have metal things? Do I have lights? Do I—"

He hit her with the butt of the rifle. He had to trip the Captain and fire a slug into him. He watched intently; from under Olya's hair there was a trickle of blood, which vanished. Olya said faintly:

"I can do this, please. It is not serious." The muscles of her face sagged. Then she sat up briskly, coughed into her fist, beamed at Jai, and announced:

"Your little plant told you also that we cannot think of so many things at once, eh?"

"I guessed it."

"Ah, yes," Olya mused. "That is true. We cannot think of so many things. Or so fast. I myself can only travel a mile in one—hop. If I were good, three miles. This is what Chuang Tzu speaks of, *ming*, generalized internal perception. There is an old fable, the squirrel on the branch runs down to where the branches join and up again, but the ivy plant, which is bound to the branch, cannot see where the squirrel went and says: 'How did you get from here to there instantaneously?" We go below this—this part—reach the join and come up the other side. There are many joins, deeper and deeper; one sits, one shuts the eyes, one lies down, ones goes into coma. You see?"

"Yes," said Jai Vedh. "Yes, yes, oh, Lord God!"

"It's not so much," said Olya, shrugging. "You have traveled much farther and faster than I have. And you people do more. I call unaided as far as I can with my voice, I cannot lift unaided what I cannot lift with my body. So it is not so good, eh?"

"I would give my right arm—!" he burst out.

"Pooh, Jai Vedh! For what? For sculpturing air? Of course not. To share thoughts? It's very dull!" and she shrugged in clumsy, exaggerated unconcern.

To share thoughts, he said, *yes. And you people are not very practiced at hiding them.* He realized with a queer, electric thrill that he had not spoken at all. Olya tilted her head, as if listening for something; in the small, indoor stream, a brown apparition appeared, naked, bearded, smiling, the Hottentot of the

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previous day. A lightning flash passed from him to Olya almost before Jai was aware of it, the most complicated communication he had ever met in his life; he put his hands over his ears and shut his eyes.

"Cut it out!" he shouted.

There was absolute silence. When he opened his eyes the man had gone. There was a line of wet footprints leading out the door, sophisticated and archaic footprints like the handprints found on rocks in Australia on old Earth, handprints that might have been made by a dawn woman like Evne, a placid little woman with God knew what superhuman intentions behind that simple face. He needed earplugs. No, mindplugs. He turned around. Olya, unbearably kittenish, was fending off the now-conscious Captain with little giggles and tiny motions of her hands. "You!" shouted Jai. The Captain recovered himself and strode over furiously to Jai, taking hold of the rifle with both hands. They stood face to face like partners in a ballet. Jai, the stronger, wrested the rifle from the other man's hands. But suddenly the Captain did not appear to notice.

"Yes," he said, "lucky I thought of it. These people are telepathic."

Jai stared.

"Degenerate, though," said the Captain. "Life's too easy that way," and he brushed past Jai and was gone. Jai turned to look at Olya.

Did you do that? he asked.

"Akh! I only gave him a little nudge," said Olya carelessly. "He was glad of an excuse not to fight."

Jai brought up the rifle and pointed it at her. He stood so for a few moments, watching her, wondering why his fear had turned to sadness. Then he tilted the dart capsules into his hand: Christmas beads a tenth-of-an-inch long planted on continuous ribbon.

Closed to me. Forever closed to me. Olya looked up brightly from her work.

"Not," she said, "necessarily."

He was outside before it occurred to him that he had never learned how to unload a sedation rifle.

Jai left the ship. He was alone.

For the first two days he was bored and met no one. On the third day, now sure that he was being watched, he began to eat whatever intruded itself on his notice (berries, bark, plant galls, grass), to remain still for long periods of time. Something kept him close to the lake. He began to talk to himself. He picked some reeds and made a flute with the blade of the Men's Traveling Manicure Set that he still kept in one of his pockets. He picked

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the hinge of it apart with his teeth and nails and scattered the parts on a wet rock; when he looked up the rock was dry and every implement but the blade was missing.

He attempted to play on the flute, and somebody came and took it away from him. He fell asleep. He did not get sunburned.

On the evening of the eighth day, Jai Vedh realized that he was surrounded by people. There was a jump in his visual field like a missed heartbeat, and people began moving on the hills, people came out from behind the trees. Like an illustration in an anthropology textbook, the naked women put up their hair; the babies played; the couples turned to each other their composed, unhuman faces. He reminded himself that telepaths have no use for facial expression: for frowns, for nods, for signs in general.

The brown man, grinning like the devil, appeared in front of him. "So you finally decided to notice us!"

"I have been stalking you," said Jai with lazy dignity. The other roared with laughter.

"Winning our trust?" he said, and abruptly his face changed. For a moment he had no expression at all. Then he threw his arms around Jai and kissed him vigorously on both cheeks. There were tears standing in his eyes.

"Welcome," he said. "Welcome, welcome, twenty times welcome!"

Several minutes after the brown man had disappeared, Jai—panic-stricken, trembling, suddenly cold with sweat—threw one arm violently across his face as if to ward off a blow. The feeling passed. A vagrant drift of air wrapped itself around him and then slipped off, leaving behind it the vaguest of vague impressions, which he could not quite form into words. The lake rippled evenly in the sunset. He had been loved, and he still lived. It was a miracle.

He forgot about it.

In the mornings the Captain went on exploratory tours; in the evenings he came back. Jai saw him do it. The man also wrote, by the light of the oil dip in Olya's cabin, a journal of his discoveries, which Jai saw him at also: the ogre writing painfully and meticulously, while behind his back little children flashed silently into and out of existence, disappearing into his shadow, the bolder ones touching him (but only just), flickering through the cabin like bats or spirits. A civilized man, the Captain had had little practice at writing by hand. He did not believe in the doctoring of a woman that he had seen, as Jai knew, but he believed in telepathy and telekinesis. For some reason he believed that teleportation was impossible. He said to

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Jai, "They say you are able to see some things yourself. Is this true? Are you picking some things up mentally?"

"I don't know," said Jai. "It's hard to distinguish from feelings and fantasies." He added:

"There's this first, that it's a matter of paying attention. In the right way, they say. It's not hereditary. They always talk about paying attention. Myself, I think it's direct perception of mass. If mass is energy, that means everything. They attend exclusively, as in hypnotism; then you go down to where the subjective and the objective meet. Then you can do anything, you see? There's no inside; there's no outside. Mass affects space-time instantaneously and at a distance. This is all instantaneous and at a distance. You have to learn it, grow up where everything makes you pay attention in the right way, to the right things. You have to start as a child. I think with other people around you. You have to be taught. It's a skill. It's tied to the body; there's something about the limits of the body; you can't do more than a certain thing. Or a kind of thing. There isn't much—if you look at it—there isn't much they can do that we can't do. In another way. Except know each other."

"They can put thoughts in people's minds, mister," said the Captain, still writing.

"So can you," said Jai. "Why do you write in this abominable light and not in the ship? To avoid hurting Olya's feelings?" The Captain looked up. The plastic pen shivered in his fingers.

"If I want to, I can keep the book of my mind shut!" he said vehemently.

"How? When you are the book," said Jai.

"Just remember," answered the other man, "that the radio is still sending. Just remember that," and he bent again to his work. Through the hut passed a middle-aged man leading a little girl by the hand, both naked. They disappeared before they reached the far wall of the hut.

People like Olya, said Jai interestedly. *This place has pleasant associations. It's some kind of terminus. Did it ever occur to you that they can see not only your body but your internal organs? Do you think of that often? How does it make you feel?*

But the other man was deaf. It was not the first time Jai had forgotten to speak out loud.

It was from Evne that he learned about the library. They walked there through rolling hills; it took them several weeks. She gave him perpetually handfuls of things to eat: whitish-green things with fuzz, and she watched him gravely while he ate them, but the gravity was not a human gravity.

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Her skull bulged above the brows; her spine twisted like a ladder; where any self-respecting animal has a facial expression, she had a trance, an intent vacancy, an idiocy of contemplation; two days out and he grabbed her by the hair: *"Talk!"*

She screamed in alarm and began to cry. She laid her head against his chest and sobbed uncontrollably, then began to hiccough; she pushed him angrily in the chest and kicked his foot. "Hold your goddamn breath!" shouted Jai.

I know (traveled from the edge of her mouth to her cheekbones to the bridge of her nose) *how to—!—cure—!—this—!—*

"Hold your breath!" (shaking her) "And talk!"

"No!" screamed Evne. "Can't! Forgot!" and she flung herself away into the bushes and the heather, rolling over and over, and finally—with a kind of return to sanity—deliberately beating her head against the ground. Jai felt pain in his temples until his head rang. Perhaps, he thought, it was not good form to talk in this part of the country. Perhaps, for a telepath, it was very difficult.

"There is no taboo," said a voice next to his ear. "It is just very difficult. Look," and opening his eyes, he saw Evne standing next to him. She pointed. The grass rolled to the horizon, whispering and light, feathery around their ankles. The sky was pale and enormous. *If one lost one's soul into this,* he thought, *it would fade out in a great fan, into vapor, right out of one's breast. One could spread oneself pretty thin in this country.*

"Evne," he said, "take my hand. I intend to lose my soul, like you."

"That's the first step," she said. "It is. It is."

The ground was covered with grass, sweet heather, alyssum, heated flat stones. It would be hot and still in the trough between hills, the smells very strong, small white blossoms giving off a choking cloud of scent like face powder; then up into the sweating, tickling side of the hill and at the top some air to take it all away. Birds exploded out of the grass in the distance, once three at a time, once a whole flight at sunset. The trunks of bushes sometimes bulged and broke, letting out a wave of water, a slow, gelatinous wave that could be taken into the hands and poured. He stripped and bathed himself. He drank. Evne swam through the long afternoon, leaning on his hand. Her hair flowed. Her lashes rose and descended lazily. The pull from his head to his feet, along a turned neck, his curved arm, down the back and the back of the knees: up the hill.

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Plunging on bended knees: down the hill. "Biblioteca," said Evne. "Bibliothèque. Bookworms," and suddenly she crumpled to her knees. Jai took her hands and pulled her up; the wind began to blow steadily. Below them the land flooded out into flats, scrub and yellow rock—and off in the distance a circle of stones, red shadows beginning to lengthen in the late sunlight.

"A Henge," said Jai.

The sand hurt their feet. Jai shivered. He could not remember when he'd taken off his clothes. Evne shuffled up to the nearest boulder with her eyes sleepily shut —she was walking into it—Jai grabbed her and was pitched head over heels, while Evne whirled round and round the rock in a violent wind, backwards.

Henge magic! someone cried out satirically. *Wicked, vicious Henge magic! And me with no trousers.*

He sat up. The floor was white marble and a little dusty, the ceiling a plain dome.

There were stone racks upon stone racks of books.

He picked one up and discovered that the book drooped limply over his hand like a membrane. His fingers left on the page black marks that faded slowly; apparently the thing was heat-sensitive. He could not read it, and the texture grew unpleasant, so he put it down.

Silent, satirical cheers from behind the rack. Evne was there. The next book rattled like dry leaves: incised, golden metal. The third and fourth were also engraved on metal; the fifth had drawings that he could not make out at all. The sixth book appeared to be a collection of anatomical sketches and cross-sections; as he opened the book, it said to him in a whisper:

Everyone understands a picture.

He shut the book. Opened again to the same page, it at once began, softly, *Everyone understands a picture.* So they had machines, of a sort. It had not, of course, spoken in words. A few racks later he ran into a hodgepode of talking books, children's books, which said:

Let's have fun together.

You can play this game.

I like you.

He carried as many as he could. He tried to think of words, or what they were good for, but he couldn't; and coming around the last rack, he saw Evne sitting with crossed legs on the floor. She was reading a book which lay limply in the junction of her ankles, like water.

He said:

He said then:

He dropped the books and said:

He shouted. He made a megaphone of his hands. He bent over

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with his head between his knees and howled, trying to force the words out. Evne threw her book aside, alarmed, but he made her stay out of it; he turned his back on her and there was the library, shelves upon shelves of language. The shelves swarmed with sound. Even these people. For what?

"Technical matters," he said, without turning round. "You need words for technical matters, Evne." The word, thus taken up, put things in their place. Like water under sand, words flooded his mind, sank, remained a little damp, vanished, and flooded again. He made himself go back and forth several times. He sat down beside Evne, holding at the same moment and with considerable effort both the worlds: to know everything and be able to say nothing and to have all the sayings and not one thing to say.

"Um," said Evne (frightened or surprised).

She got to her feet in one movement, uncrossed her ankles, and began to move stealthily down the aisle of books, swaying like a snake trying to walk on its tail. She looked over her shoulder with a weak, idiotic smile; she looked uncomfortable and unpleasant, as if she were being polite. When he followed her and took hold of her by the waist, she tried to disengage herself. He moved forward automatically, making her back up until she backed into one of the book racks; it then occurred to him to bend her back over one of the shelves and see if perhaps they could make a go of it, if he went quickly enough. She turned her face away. Unable to enter her without losing his balance, he half-came, half-didn't against her belly. He was trembling with unspent excitement. Evne, her face flushed and indecisive, leaned against the shelf and fingered her back. She turned and walked away from him. She looked thoughtful and pained. She stopped and looked back at him, then walked on, stopped and looked back again.

Excitement, discomfort, he thought. *Like a mirror.*

"I want to go out," she said in a small voice.

"Go on!" said Jai Vedh.

She opened the door, backed out, and disappeared. He bent under the lintel of the door, watching the high walls vanish and turn back to boulders, the floor into sand. He followed Evne, who was wandering into the grassy hills; he took hold of her forearm.

"Lie down."

She stood obstinately still.

"I'm not going to be eaten alive," he said. "I'm not going to spend the rest of the week walking with my knees bowed as if I had rickets. Lie down."

She smirked at him.

Furious, he kicked her feet

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out from under her and fell on top of her, careful to protect himself from her knees. A subversive intention, born in the basalt layer miles below them, broke surface, flooded through the grass, through her, into him; tears started from under her closed eyelids and she whispered, *Aren't you scared?* and kissed him, a dab on the point of the jaw.

Yes, I'm going to die, he said, and in order to prolong his death and his terror, caressed her until he couldn't see, until the continent under him swelled and closed around him, entangled him, dragged him into the swamps. He was terrified all over, in his hands and his feet, his joints, his belly; there were vultures over his head. He relaxed only at the very last, and the last was soft, quite soft, *like* (he thought) *being mauled to death with pillows.* He rolled over and shuddered, laughed, tried to cry, thought: *You're a fool.*

Evne sat on him and yanked at his ears. He laughed again.

"I'm no longer a virgin," he said.

"Some repertoire for a virgin!" She made a face. He saw clearly somewhere in the back of her mind a lake whose dirt and algae, loosened twice a year, rose, turned over at the surface and drifted to shore. She pulled his hair and whispered:

"I want to do it again. Lie back."

"Can't."

Can. Don't men every cry? she added, poking him. "Can," he said. "Will."

But Evne turned white, turned into a stone woman.

Some information, emphatic but inexplicable, about the relation of a (complex) to a (complex) to a (complex) shot at him out of the Northwest, crossed the sky, and disappeared below the Southeastern horizon.

She said:

"It's your radio. They've come."

It took them only two days to get back to the village. So crowded with messages it sagged (her face). The second day: walk according to invisible intersections, turn around, head the other way, stop (expressionless), poke the woman and she doesn't move, like an old stone; the old idea came back, *If this is an animated compass, who's moving it?*

"I'm *thinking*," replies Evne in the voice of a golem. "I love you," she croaks.

They went into new country, gullies choked with scrub, elderberry bushes, things that whipped back into their bodies and faces. Evne talked to herself in a series of unintelligible nasalities. "Don't be alarmed," she says in a voice of scraped lead and walks into a bees' nest; no one was stung. There was a stream bed cut into clayey soil, hung with tangling

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vines, familiar patches of shale that slipped when stepped on. It was, he believed, *Adventure Country*. It was, he thought, *The Back Yard*. Several miles from the village, Evniki rocketed from the woods, spared them one dumb, anguished glance, and vanished like a snuffed wick. She left behind her the idea of a long house, a very long house, stood on end. A male fourteen-year-old flickered in front of them, dodged (admiring glance at Jai's beard) and was gone. The female golem of Jai Vedh, who was covered with scratches, bruises, and dried blood, and who staggered instead of walked, here gave a terrible, loud groan and fell on the ground. He held her head in his lap until she recovered, not knowing what else to do. He himself was smarting in a dozen places. She opened her eyes, said "Oh, Lord" in a weak voice, and shut them again; he saw her wounds close and new pink ribbons of skin extrude from the breaks, flattening out as his own pains eased. Someone was doing the same for him. The grass got softer. He hauled protesting Evne to her feet. They held hands as they walked. Trouble, worry and doubt beat on him steadily from in front, from the ship parked in the village at the end of the path, giving him an ache in his chest; there were five armed men standing in the scorched clearing. They walked about glowing with the glamor of the children's excitement, stepping on the dead ash as if it were the palm of the hand of the adult community, which might suddenly close on them and of which they were also unaware. They were being picked bone from bone as they walked around; they grinned and their vitals were instantaneously transfixed by crooked electric bolts of thought. He parted the burned branches for Evne at the edge of the clearing, and he felt the ash rain down on her skin; with a convulsive effort he was looking through the eyes of the five men at five Jai Vedhs, each smeared with sweat and ash, each in a slightly different position (five separate snapshots of the same thing), and each with a beard gone wild like an exploded haystack. He saw the five insane uniforms get scared, he watched the sympathetic nervous systems fire off. The men smiled ingratiatingly, wrinkling the corners of their eyes. One put out his hand. The Captain was inside the ferry, sweating to get away. The man who had put out his hand now advanced one foot in front of the other also, and when Jai Vedh drew back from this unaccountable paralysis, the deaf madman only drew up the corners of his eyes further and remained in this position, like a nervous and smiling dog. Eventually Jai shook his hand.

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I'll kill you, you crazy sonofabitch, I'll kill you! cried the madman fearfully.

"Speak slowly," said Jai. Behind him Evne was fabricating a dress from the atoms of the air, pulling it on with her teeth, so to speak. There was a jolt of male fear in the clearing, then a vague ease. The five men forgot and relaxed. The one who had shaken hands blinked, grinned tolerantly, and lounged back, folding his arms.

"Well, you certainly have gone native, and that's a fact," said the man humorously.

"Yes, I have," said Jai.

"Welcome back," said the man.

"It's nice to be back," said Jai.

The man shot him, but of course could not. It was not much of a surprise to Jai when the five became statues, along with the Captain; it did not surprise him at all that the ship disappeared; he half expected to hear Evne remark: *Now we start on THEM,* and to hear, or see, or smell *ftun* people disperse to control the weather, the sun, animals, plants, the sea, their own bodies, while one man held the other six motionless.

Who is doing that work? he said idly, and from the dark side of the world (teleportation is instantaneous; even in stages one can go fast) came someone's answer (he would learn whose; he would know all eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven in time):

Jai Vedh . . .

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Robert Coulson was born in 1928. He has worked as a barn painter, draftsman, technical writer and inside man in a wool-bagging team (which is a new one for us). Gene DeWeese has been a technical writer for the past ten years, the last five of which have been spent working on the Apollo program. As "Thomas Stratton" they have written two MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. *novels and claim to be the only living authors who ever had a novel accepted and the dedication for it rejected. (The publisher thought the dedication, "To my wives and child" might be too risque.)*

THE TRACY BUSINESS

by Gene DeWeese and Robert Coulson

I TELL YOU THE WORLD IS GOING to hell lately. There just isn't any justice any more, none whatsoever. Take this Tracy business, for example.

Mrs. Tracy bustled into my office last Friday, and I did my best to make her feel at home. Not that I overdid it, you understand, but I could tell right off that she had more money than she knew what to do with. Like that fur coat she shrugged off, so casually it almost fell on the floor. The last time I'd looked outside, it had been over 70°.

"What can I do for you, Miss . . . ?"

"Tracy, and it's Mrs.—Mrs Arthur Tracy." She smiled, more than necessary for the hired help, I thought. "And what you can do, Mr. Duane, is nail my husband."

I sighed inwardly, but managed to keep an interested look on my face as I asked her to explain. Rich or poor, they all had the same problems when they came to a private detective.

"He's up to something," she said. "Another woman, most likely. Whatever it is, I want you to get the goods on him."

"Divorce?"

"And *lots* of alimony! He's loaded."

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Well, at least she's honest, I thought. "Okay, what makes you think he's stepping out? Do you have any facts?"

"He's taken to disappearing two or three days every month, for one thing. I want to know who with and where."

I made a few meaningless doodles on a notepad. "The same days every month? One day at a time, or all together?"

"All together. I kept track of the dates, just in case." She handed me a list, and I checked it. May 1, 2, and 3; May 30, 31, and June 1, and there were more. They didn't ring any bells, except that all were pretty close to the end of a month.

"Not exactly once a month," I pointed out. "Twice in May."

Mrs. Tracy shrugged. "Near enough. Besides, I don't care about his timing. I want to know who he's with. He says he goes out of town on business, but he doesn't."

"How do you know?"

"I checked with his office, that's how. His partner didn't want to tell me, but I got it out of him anyway. Arthur told *him* that he's got a bad nervous condition and has to get away from business pressures every so often. Nerves!" she snorted.

"How does he go?" I asked. "Car, plane, bus . . . ?"

"He drives. Takes the good car, too, and leaves *me* the Buick."

I nodded in sympathy. "Is that all?"

She glared at me for a moment; my disinterest must have started showing through. "No, that's not all." She rummaged through her purse for a moment, then triumphantly tossed a heavy key onto my desk. "I found this in his clothes one night. I had a duplicate made, and it doesn't fit anything, either at home or at his office."

"That doesn't prove anything."

"What do you think I'm hiring *you* for? But if you're not interested, I'll get somebody else." She started to reach for the key.

"I'm interested, Mrs. Tracy," I said hastily. "It's just that in divorce cases I like to be sure of my ground before I begin. Now then, just what do you want in the way of evidence? Documents, photographs, a witness, or all three? And how soon? My fees, you realize, vary according—"

"Damn your fees," she snapped. "I can pay your lousy fees. What kind of evidence? How should I know? You're the expert. I want something that will get me a divorce with the least trouble and the most alimony. Whatever that takes, get it! And I want it right now; he's already told me he's planning another 'business trip' this weekend. He'll probably be leaving from his office sometime this afternoon. You take it from there, if you want the case."

"I'll take it from there," I assured her. "Where's his office?"

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She gave me an address, which I jotted down on the notepad with the doodles.

"One more thing," I said as she slithered into her coat. "Any idea where he met the woman? Or when?"

She shook her head. "Not really. It started right after we got back from our European tour. We went in the off-season—to save money, he said!" She snorted again. "You know what he wanted to do? Get a tent and stuff and rent a car and camp out! In Europe! Practically in the middle of winter! Liked the feel of the outdoors, he said. Well, I told him what he could do with his damned tent and his feelings in the outdoors! He went off by himself and I stayed in Italy, in a decent hotel. So I don't know what crazy ideas he got or who he met, but whatever it was, it probably started there. I didn't notice him paying attention to anyone on the ship back, but that doesn't mean anything; he could have paid her way on another ship. God knows, he's wasted enough money on her since she got here."

I raised my eyebrows. "You hadn't mentioned that."

"Every time he goes away, he takes a bundle of cash with him. What else could it be for?"

"Blackmail?"

"If it's blackmail, why does it take him three days to pay it? Anyway, whatever it is, I want to know."

"You'll know," I said, and named a fee approximately three times what I normally charge.

She agreed without batting an eye, wrote out a check for three days' expenses, gave me the duplicate key and a photograph of Arthur, and stalked out the door. "Blackmail!" she muttered as she slammed the door. "Arthur'd sooner be exposed than spend money."

Then why *was* he spending it? Tightwads generally found mistresses too expensive, unless . . . I thought of the coat she had treated so lightly and wondered how much of a tightwad you had to be to shell out for one of those. But maybe Mrs. Tracy had a different idea of a tightwad than I did.

Following Arthur Tracy was easy. He drove at just under the legal speed limits at all times, always signaled his turns well in advance, stayed on well-traveled roads and streets, and went directly to his destination, which turned out to be Briarcliff Sanitarium. As I drove past the huge iron gates in front, they were closing behind his car.

I drove on to the nearest side road, parked, got out, and climbed a convenient hill. From the top, I could see nothing but trees, so I roamed back and forth until I located a spot where I could see over the high stone wall that surrounded Briarcliff. I didn't really expect to see much, and I didn't.

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Tracy's car was parked in front of the main building. Adjusting the binoculars I'd brought along, I made sure the car was empty. I decided to wait a while, just in case, but it wasn't necessary. Almost immediately, the door of the main building opened, and Tracy came out with another man. I couldn't be sure, but I thought it was the manager of the place. They didn't speak as they walked down a path to one of the dozens of individual cabins that were scattered about the wooded grounds.

Now what? Briarcliff was *the* place for anyone who had a lot of money and a nutty relative. It was built like a resort, cost several times as much, and was noted for its discretion and privacy. The family black sheep could be quietly kept out of circulation without the press or anyone else obtaining a hint of the situation. It could, I supposed, be used as a weekend retreat as well—if you had a weird turn of mind. The residents, or inmates if you prefer, were guaranteed against outside interference, and with the isolated cabins, there was no need to be seen by any of the other residents, either.

But, like I said, to use Briarcliff as a cover for a private love nest would take someone with a pretty weird outlook on life. What woman—or man, for that matter—would want to spend her weekends in what was, when you came down to it, an expensive nut house? But, then, who would want to camp out in Europe in the winter?

Besides, even if someone did, would Briarcliff go along with it?

So what else could Arthur Tracy be doing there? Not resting, certainly; any of a dozen resorts were better equipped and less expensive, and from what his wife said, Tracy was a tight man with a dollar.

Psychiatric care? An hour a day under analysis would be cheaper, and easier to conceal from his wife, if he thought it needed concealing. At least, I thought, I've found out what he does with the "bundle of cash" he takes with him. Three days at Briarcliff would take care of a pretty large bundle.

But the rest of it didn't make sense, which is what I told Mrs. Tracy when I phoned her that evening. I had watched the place until dark, and nothing had happened. Tracy had disappeared into the cabin, the Briarcliff official had returned to the main building, someone had put Tracy's car in a garage, and that was it. When I had finished, I asked Mrs. Tracy what was next. I could call in an extra man and keep watch, but the sensible thing would be to refund her money for the next two days and head for home.

"Get in there and find out what he's up to!" she said, as if it were

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the most obvious thing in the world.

"Mrs. Tracy," I explained patiently, "this is Briarcliff. It has guards, it has high walls, maybe even a watchdog or two, and it has a hot line to the local and state cops. They are not about to let me in, under any pretext. They are being paid to maintain their patients' privacy."

"My husband isn't a patient."

"But he's paying them for his privacy, anyway. As far as they're concerned, he's a patient, no matter what *you* think."

"I'll bet! His girl friend was probably waiting for him when he got there."

"There is such a thing as committing yourself voluntarily for treatment," I pointed out.

She laughed. "I think I'm going nuts, so I'll just have myself put away—once a month. Sure."

"That's all some people might need; just treatment once a month." I didn't say what was in my mind, that living with her for a month would give anyone reason to spend a couple of days in a sanitarium.

"Only thing I've heard of where a guy commits himself is to dry out. Or kick some habit. And if he's in there getting pulled off some kind of drug, that's just as good for me as a woman would be. Isn't addiction grounds for divorce?"

I continued to protest, but I don't think she listened. Her husband was using the place for a love nest, and she was going to get proof. Anything else, she didn't hear.

A half hour later, she showed up at my office. If I'd had any sense, I wouldn't have been there, but I needed the money.

"I tried to talk to that knothead who runs the place," she said as I opened the office door for her. "He wouldn't even admit Arthur was there."

"I hope you didn't mention my name," I said.

She didn't bother to comment. "I told him I'd pay twice whatever my husband pays, but . . ." She grimaced.

"There are some things money won't buy," I said philosophically. I'm not one of them, however, so after I'd hit her for bail money—which I was sure we would both be needing shortly—we headed for Briarcliff with a telescoping ladder and a few other odds and ends.

I was surprised how easy it was to get in. After a while, I guess, the guards at a place like that start believing the news stories about how impossible it is to get in, and they get careless, or lazy. I'd worried a little about having to use a light or risk falling over things in the dark, but the Briarcliff grounds were well kept and the full moon gave us plenty of light.

From a distance, the cabin

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Tracy was in looked like a particularly plush resort cabin, but as we got closer I could see the differences. The ornamental grillwork over the windows wasn't as lacy as it had seemed at first glance, and the walls looked extremely solid. As we went up to the door, I saw something else: the glass in the windows had been replaced by what looked like steel plates. They glittered in the moonlight like glass, but they didn't allow any light to enter—or escape.

"If the key doesn't fit, what then?" I whispered.

She pointed to my shoulder and made a lunging motion. I'd been afraid that would be her answer. I'm big enough to break down most normal doors, but I'd seen enough to know this cabin wasn't normal, and anyone breaking its door down would need a tank. But for the money I was getting, I'd have to try; my shoulder ached just thinking about it.

However, the key fit, and my shoulder got a reprieve. I got the camera ready as Mrs. Tracy pushed the door open. There were no lights inside, but the moonlight showed me enough to make me feel like an idiot. The floor and walls were completely covered with a soft, quilted material. The whole cabin was a gigantic padded cell!

Not to Mrs. Tracy, though. I'll say one thing for her: once she made up her mind, she didn't change it. "I'll be damned!" she exclaimed as she pushed into the cabin. "A wall-to-wall bed! I didn't think Arthur had that much imagination."

I stepped up behind her, camera still ready despite everything. I was being paid to take pictures, and, by God, that's what I was going to do.

Before my eyes adjusted enough so that I could see anything except in the moonlight through the door, something over in one corner snarled. Individual watchdogs, I wondered, as we both spun toward the sound and I triggered the camera.

All I could see in the flash was something large and hairy, crouching to leap, and an instant later it did. Mrs. Tracy screamed and backed into me and stumbled. I practically fell out the door as the thing hit her and she went down.

Without a gun, there wasn't anything I could do, not against that thing; I'd seen enough to know that it wasn't anything as simple as a watchdog. And if there's one thing I'm not, it's a hero, so I just ran. I heard a half dozen of the real dogs and as many guards and alarms, but there was just enough adrenalin in me to make it, and I did. I'll need a new suit, but I made it.

I got the film developed the next morning by a discreet friend with a darkroom. Arthur Tracy was just barely recognizable be-

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hind all the fur and fangs in that one shot I'd gotten—a werewolf sure enough. Just to be absolutely sure, though, I checked an almanac; all the dates she had given me were full moons.

The morning paper told the rest of the story. Mrs. Arthur Tracy had died unexpectedly during the night. There weren't any details, but someone was obviously covering up. A closed-coffin funeral had already been announced.

So there it is, and I can't think of a damn thing to do. Tracy obviously killed his wife while in his werewolf form, but who would believe me, even with the picture? Can you imagine me going up to a cop or a D.A. with this story? I'd be lucky to keep out of a nut-ward.

I ask you, where's the justice in something like this? The world doesn't believe in werewolves anymore, so I'm left out in the cold. If I can't get anyone to believe me, how the hell can I blackmail the guy?

In the February issue of

Venture Science Fiction

Keith Laumer's new novel, THE STAR TREASURE, about a far-future Earth that is controlled by a small group of Starlords. Their power is absolute, but the source of it is a mystery. The story begins with a murder in the Rings of Saturn, the first of a strange and suspenseful tangle of events that enable one man to get at the core of the mystery. Plus, short stories, book reviews and other features.

For the best in action-adventure SF, look for the February issue of VENTURE, on sale now at your newsstands. (Every issue of VENTURE features a full-length novel; all stories are new and complete in one issue. If you missed the May, August, or November issues, or if you have trouble finding the February issue at your newsstand, copies are available from the publisher. 60¢ each to Mercury Press, Inc., P.O. Box 271 Rockville Centre, N.Y. 11571.

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SCIENCE

Dr. Asimov needs no introduction, and we generally don't give him one. This month, however, we'd like to mention the publication of two new books that our readers will want to know about. The first is titled OPUS 100; *it is Isaac Asimov's one-hundredth book, recently published by Houghton Mifflin Company. It is first of all a stimulating and entertaining anthology of selections from Dr. Asimov's first 99 works. Equally important are the author's prefatory remarks, which are interwoven with the selections and which the jacket copy accurately describes as providing a most engaging literary biography. The second book will be published in January by Doubleday (and if you thought it was #101, you've underestimated our science editor; it's #103). Its title is* THE SOLAR SYSTEM AND BACK; *it is the seventh collection of essays from this magazine.—E. L. F.*

THE MULTIPLYING ELEMENTS

by Isaac Asimov

WHEN, AS A SCHOOLBOY, I FOUND either the teacher or the subject (or both) dull, my attention would naturally wander. There is nothing as painful as boredom, and a wandering attention is thankful for even the slightest relief.

Chemistry was, in that respect, wonderful, for I have never been in a decent chemistry lecture room in which a large periodic chart of the elements was not hanging somewhere in the front of the room. One could study it without too obviously turning one's eyes away from the lecturer, and it was complicated enough to allow hours of contemplation.

The old-style charts of the late 1930s charmed me most with the

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manner in which a whole group of elements tried to squeeze their way into a single slot. The chart had to have an asterisk at that point, and the elements had to be spread out at the bottom. They were labelled the "rare-earth elements."

While I was still relatively naive about the periodic table, this little item afforded me much speculation and preserved my sanity when the tide of boredom washed dangerously near my mental nostrils. Why "rare"? I would wonder. Why "earths"? I would wonder. Why do they all insist on crowding into the same spot? I would wonder.

I eventually found the answers to the questions and you know me: I like nothing better than sharing these little finds with you.

The ancient Greeks* considered one of the basic components of the universe (i.e., "elements," to use the Latin term) to be "earth." By this, they didn't really mean the literal earthy stuff we stand on, but a kind of ideal solid which was to be found in differing proportion in the various components of the planetary crust.

Some of those components were rather un-earthy. There were, for instance, the various metals, which had luster and were malleable, whereas typical earthy components were dull and brittle. There were also carbon and sulfur, which lacked luster and were brittle, but which burned, whereas typical earthy components were unaffected by heat.

We might say that substances which are sufficiently earthy to be considered "earth" ought to be dull, brittle and unaffected by heat—like the rocks, sand and clay that are all about us.

Even if we confine "earth" to substances with those properties, it still turns out that the term applies not to a single material but to a large group of minerals that differ among themselves. There was no "earth," but merely different "earths."

Using modern terminology, we would define an "earth" as a stable oxide with a high melting-point. The four most common of these were silica, alumina, lime and magnesia in that order. In modern terminology, we would call them silicon dioxide (SiO_2), aluminum oxide (Al_2O_3), calcium oxide (CaO) and magnesium oxide (MgO). Singly and in combination (as "silicates"), these four earths make up just about two-thirds of the earth's crust. It was impossible to pick up any sizable chunk of that crust anywhere without finding quantities of each of the four.

Chemists of the late eighteenth century suspected that these earths

I love to start an essay with "The ancient Greeks—" and I frequently do.

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were metallic oxides, and in due time those metals were isolated. (Silicon is at best a semi-metal, I hasten to say, before the letters pour in.)

Two other very common solid substances, obtained in one fashion or another from the environment, were soda and potash. In modern terminology, these are sodium carbonate (Na_2CO_3) and potassium carbonate (K_2CO_3). Chemically, they differ from the earths in that they are carbonates rather than oxides, but that was not the distinction that forced itself upon the early chemists.

What was more important to them was that soda and potash were freely soluble in water, something that was not true of an earth. Then, too, soda and potash, once dissolved, have distinctive properties, such as the ability to neutralize acids.

Since soda and potash were most easily obtained by burning certain plants in big pots and extracting the ash (hence "pot-ash"), they were called alkalis, from an Arabic word meaning "ash." (The Arabs were the great alchemists of the early Middle Ages, and chemistry went through a period in which great prestige was attached to Arabic words.) Solutions of soda and potash were said to be alkaline in properties.

Well, it so happens that of the very common earths, two—lime and magnesia—are somewhat soluble in water and produce solutions with alkaline properties. They were therefore referred to as the "alkaline earths" and are still so named to this day. The metals obtained from lime and magnesia (calcium and magnesium, respectively), plus related metals isolated from related, but less common, earths (beryllium, strontium and barium) were, and are, termed the alkaline earth elements.

Indeed, when, in the last years of the nineteenth century, the glamorous element radium was discovered, it turned out to be a member of the same family—very similar to barium in its chemical properties, in fact. Radium is an alkaline earth metal.

(Have no fears that the soil will wash away because two of the important earths are soluble. Lime and magnesia occur in combination with silica, as calcium and magnesium silicates, and in that form are quite insoluble.)

Now we are ready to go on to the next part of the story.

Three miles from Stockholm was a quarry that bore the name of Ytterby. Why it bore that name, whether it was the name of the region, or the proprietor, or what, I haven't the faintest idea. I cannot

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find the spot or the name in the largest atlases and gazetteers I possess, and I have some good ones. If some Gentle Reader can help me, I wish he would—but until then I can only say that near Stockholm, Sweden, there was the Ytterby rock quarry.

One day in 1787, a Swedish army officer, Lieutenant Carl Axel Arrhenius (1757-1824), who was an amateur mineralogist, picked up an unusual black rock at the quarry. He could not identify it and rightly assumed it was a mineral that had not been scientifically studied hitherto. He called it "ytterbite," making use of the "-ite" suffix commonly given to minerals.

The curious mineral attracted attention, of course, and in 1794, a Finnish chemist (in those days, Finland was part of the Swedish realm) named Johan Gadolin (1760-1852) took it apart chemically. It was a combination of several different oxides, one of which was silica.

One of the oxides which Gadolin separated out and found to make up nearly $\frac{2}{5}$ of the whole, struck him as most unusual. It was not to be identified with any other known substance and yet it had all the properties of an earth. It was insoluble, non-metallic and unaffected by heat. He announced it as a new earth and called it "yttria." It was clear by that time that earths were oxides and a new earth would have to be the oxide of a new metal. The actual metal of this earth was not isolated for another half-century, but that was a detail. It was there; it was known to be there; and the discoverer of the earth was considered the discoverer of the metal. The metal was almost invariably named after the earth in the case of new discoveries, with the "-ium" ending conventionally added. Thus yttria was the oxide of "yttrium" and Gadolin was considered its discoverer.

In 1812, a Scottish chemist, Thomas Thomson (1773-1852) visited the quarry and marvelled over the mineral. He was still under the spell of the word "earth." If an object was called an "earth," surely it would have to be a major component of the earth. The common earths were all major components of the earth's crust and were found everywhere, so surely that proved that that was the way an earth *ought* to be. (I'm not responsible for this curiously circular logic; this sort of thing often happens when human terminology is mistaken for natural law.)

Now Thomson was staring at an earth, yttria, that could only be found in one or two favored spots and was unknown elsewhere. He wrote, concerning it, "A peculiar earth confined to a peculiar spot and in very minute quantities, can hardly be conceived." *

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Yttria, in other words, was a "rare earth" which, to Thomson, was almost a contradiction in terms, and that very contradiction helped make the phrase notable to chemists generally. Thomson cited two other examples of rare earths: glucina (beryllium oxide, BeO) and zirconia (zirconium oxide, XrO_2). However, because of developing events, the title of "rare earths" was not applied to all earths which happened to be rare, but was restricted to yttria and its relatives—for indeed yttria turned out to have relatives.

Gadolin lived a long and respectable life, serving with honor as a chemistry professor at the University of Abo, but one must admit that his discovery of yttria was his only deed of real note—and yet it was enough. What Lieutenant Arrhenius had called "ytterbite" was renamed "gadolinite" in his honor, and more awaited him in the future.

Once Gadolin had made his splash, other chemists naturally yearned to get into the act, and Swedish minerals began to get a fine-tooth combing. One of the chemists who plunged into action was a German named Martin Heinrich Klaproth (1743-1817). He had already made a name for himself as a discoverer of elements. In 1789, he had discovered zirconium (whose earth was listed by Thomson as one of the apparently paradoxical rare earths, but which isn't included in that term today) and uranium. In 1798, he discovered chromium.

Now, in 1803, he tackled a heavy Swedish mineral that was not quite like gadolinite but that looked promisingly novel. From it, he isolated an earth that was not quite like yttria and yet was not like anything else, either. Obviously it was something new, and he called it "terre ochroite," meaning "pale yellow earth," which, I think you will agree, is a perfectly rotten name.

At almost the same time, Sweden's (and Europe's) greatest living chemist, Jons Jakob Berzelius (1779-1848), working with a Swedish geologist, Wilhelm Hisinger (1766-1852), isolated the same earth. Klaproth was first by a hair, so he gets the credit for the discovery, but it was Berzelius who gave the new earth a sensible name, and, oddly enough, he used a precedent established by Klaproth.

In the middle ages, the alchemists had named the various metals after the various planets (see THE SEVENTH METAL, F & SF, January 1968). When Klaproth had discovered a new element in

I refer you, by the way, to a book called "Discovery of the Elements" by Weeks and Leicester, 7th edition (Journal of Chemical Education, 1968). It is loaded with curious information scarcely to be found elsewhere.

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1789, he remembered that only eight years before a new planet had been discovered for the first time in the period of written history. The new planet had been named Uranus, and it seemed appropriate to Klaproth to name the new element "uranium" in its honor.

When Berzelius and Hisinger obtained their new earth in 1803, they kept in mind the fact that two years earlier another new planet was discovered, and that it had been named Ceres. They called their earth "ceria" therefore, and it was that name which stuck. (Ceres was the precursor of a whole family of similar planets—the asteroids—and cerium, with yttrium, was the precursor of a whole family of similar elements. This is the kind of coincidence that wouldn't be believed in a work of fiction.)

For something like a generation, the two sister earths (for they were very similar in chemical properties), yttria and ceria, were accepted for what they were and then one chemist, at least, began to wonder—The two earths were sufficiently similar so that, if mixed, they would be hard to separate by nineteenth century techniques. Could one be sure that *other* earths were not mixed with one or the other or both?

The chemist who wondered about this was Carl Gustav Mosander (1797-1858), a pupil of Berzelius's. He had already involved himself with the rare earths when he tried to isolate the metallic portion of ceria by using potassium vapor to snatch away the oxygen. He managed an imperfect separation by this means (and handling potassium vapor isn't something I would ever care to try myself) and obtained an impure sample of the metal, cerium. He was the first to isolate a rare-earth metal, but really pure samples of cerium and its sister metals had to wait for the twentieth century.

Now in search of new earths, he treated ceria with nitric acid and found, sure enough, that some of it dissolved more easily than the rest. The dissolved portion he separated and found it to be an earth that was not ceria, though very like it. He called this new one "lanthana" from a Greek word meaning "hidden" because it was, after all, hidden in the ceria. (The name was Berzelius's suggestion.)

But Mosander wasn't finished. He kept working with the lanthana he had obtained to see if *it* was pure. It took him two years of painstaking treatment by the crude methods of those days, but by 1841, he had satisfied himself that the lanthana he had obtained from ceria was itself not pure but contained another earth that was still more subtly hidden. This new earth he called "didymia," from the Greek word for "twin," because it seemed to him to be an almost inseparable twin of lanthana.

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This had gone past a joke by now. One unusual earth, yttria, had been remarkable and enough. To have it multiply like rabbits was disturbing. Four similar earths now existed: yttria, ceria, lanthana, and didymia, in that order of discovery. Who was to say how many more there might be?

The term "rare earths" began to be applied to this family specifically.

Mosander continued his disturbing way, too. He had tackled Klaproth's ceria and had ripped two new earths out of it. Wasn't it appropriate that he do the same for Gadolin's yttria, which was now half a century old and had not yet had a proper ransacking?

He began his treatment of samples of yttria. Carefully, he removed from it any ceria, lanthana, and didymia it contained (and it did contain them, to be sure, for any sample of a rare earth, prepared without unusual care, seemed to contain bits and pieces of all the family).

Once that was done, he ought to have pure yttria, but did he? By careful treatment with nitric acid, he finally obtained, in 1843, three different earths of different solubility in the acid. Each even had its own color. A colorless earth made up the largest fraction of the original and for this he retained the name yttria. A yellow earth, which he isolated from the original, he called "erbia" and a rose-colored one, "terbia."

All three names, yttria, erbia and terbia, are derived from the name of the original quarry, Ytterby. It makes sense to do this in one way, since it shows the close chemical relationship of the three earths and their common origin.

In another sense, however, it pays entirely too much honor to Ytterby. The number of elements is limited, and their names should be carefully conserved for appropriate commemoration. (Of course, they weren't; many of the names were chosen for utterly trivial reasons, and it is too late now ever to do anything about it.)

What's more, the names erbia and terbia are entirely too similar in sound, and it is absurdly easy to confuse them. Indeed, Mosander's original assignment of the two names was twisted, and what he originally called erbia came to be called terbia and vice versa. This made no real difference, but it shows the complication that can ensue when names are carelessly chosen.

There the situation stood for another generation. There were now six rare earths, and they were a standing embarrassment to chemists. In 1869, Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeléev (1834-1907) devised a peri-

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odic table of the elements, which arranged the elements in a rational order based on their chemical properties. The usefulness of this table was shown by the fact that it made it possible to predict certain elements that remained to be discovered and to describe their properties with a high degree of accuracy. All the elements ought to have fit neatly into the table, and two of the rare earth elements known at the time—yttrium and lanthanum—did. The other four, however, didn't, and that part of the situation grew rapidly worse. Other rare earths were discovered and all but one did not fit into the table.

In 1878, a Swiss chemist named Jean Charles Galissard de Marignac (1817-1894) tackled erbia (the rose-colored earth which Mosander had originally called terbia). By further treatment he divided it into a colorless earth, and one that was a darker red than the original. Since the original erbia was colored, he kept the name for the red earth. The other one, colorless, he called "ytterbia," *also* from that Ytterby quarry, the *fourth* earth (and, therefore, element) to be so honored.

The very next year, 1879, a Swedish chemist, Lars Fredrik Nilson (1840-1899) began with Marignac's ytterbium and managed to get still another earth out of it. Fortunately, he couldn't think of a fifth way to torture Ytterby into supplying a name, so he generalized and called it "scandia" for the Scandinavian peninsula as a whole.

This earth *did* fit into Mendeléev's table (the last of the rare earths to do so where the 19th century version of the table was concerned) and in a particularly glamorous way. When Mendeléev had worked out his table, he used it to predict the properties of three elements that were as yet undiscovered. One of those elements had been discovered in 1875 and named "gallium" and had fit the prediction perfectly (see THE PREDICTED METAL, F & SF, February 1968). The new earth, scandia, contained the metallic element "scandium" which was obviously the equivalent of the second of Mendeléev's predicted elements and it fit the predicted properties perfectly also.

But if Marignac's ytterbia had yielded a new earth, what about the erbia from which that ytterbia had come? Could the erbia be made to yield still more goodies?

Another Swedish chemist, Per Theodore Cleve (1840-1905) found it could. In 1879, he completed the separation of erbia into three fractions. For the major fraction he retained the name erbia. The two minor fractions he called "holmia" and "thulia." Holmia was named for Stockholm, the city in which Cleve was born. Thulia was named for Thule which, in ancient times, was the legendary land of the far north and which some people equated with Scandinavia.

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And still it went on, when a French chemist, Paul Emile Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1838-1912), took a hand. It had been he who had discovered gallium by means of new-fangled spectroscopic techniques. It turned out that each element gave its own combination of spectral lines when heated white-hot, and Lecoq now turned his spectroscope on the rare earths.

It would no longer be necessary to work blindly. If two samples of a particular earth, obtained from different minerals, or prepared by different techniques, showed differences in their spectra, then the sample wasn't pure and more than one substance was present.

Lecoq found Mosander's old earth, didymia, to be spectroscopically suspicious and began to fractionate it, being guided by spectra at every step. In 1879, he split off a new earth and named it "samaria."

One might think that this name comes from the Biblical city of Samaria, but it does not. It happened that the ore Lecoq was working with was named "samarskite." What's more, samarskite was a type of ore first discovered in Russia and was named after one Colonel Samarski, an obscure mining official. Samarium was the first element to be named for a human being and, as luck would have it, it was for someone of no recognizable merit whatever.

Lecoq did better in 1886 when he obtained still another earth from samaria, identical to one that Marignac had earlier obtained (with less certainty) in 1880. Marignac gets the credit for the discovery, but it was Lecoq who gave it its name. With Marignac's permission, he named the new earth "gadolinia" after old Johan Gadolin, who had started the whole thing nearly a century before and who was now dead a generation. That at least was worthy.

Samarium and gadolinium are the only two stable elements in the entire list of eighty-one to be named for human beings. Other and greater men have been honored but names such as Mendeléev, Curie, Einstein and Fermi have had to be used for short-lived radioactive elements discovered after World War II.

In the space of a little over two years, then, no less than six new rare earths had been found and there was *still* no way in which chemists could predict how many more remained to be discovered.

Didymia, for instance, which had served as source for samaria and gadolinia, still looked suspicious even after those two had been separated out. An Austrian chemist, Karl Auer, Baron von Welsbach (1858-1929) tackled didymia in 1885 and found that the earth, which had originally been named "twin" was indeed a pair of twin-elements. He split it neatly in two.

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For the first time, a separation did not leave one preponderant fraction to which the original name could still be applied. Didymia disappeared altogether from the list of earths, the only established rare earth (it had been on the list for 44 years) to do so. The two fractions were named "praseodymia" ("green twin" because it was a greenish-yellow in color) and "neodymia" ("new twin").

The next year, 1886, Lecoq de Boisbaudran worked with Cleve's "holmia" and managed to isolate still another rare earth, which he named "dysprosia" from a Greek word meaning "hard to get at."

Things slackened off after that but did not die altogether. Even after the opening of the twentieth century, new earths were found. In 1901, a French chemist, Eugène Demarçay, put samaria through a series of elaborate fractionations and ended with a new earth he named "europia" after the entire continent.

Finally, in 1907, another French chemist, Georges Urbain (1872-1938) did the same to ytterbia and isolated still another rare earth which he used for a far more specific honor. He called it "lutetia" after the Roman name of the town which later came to be called Paris. (Urbain was born in Paris, needless to say.)

Here let us call a temporary halt and take a look at the rare earths that were known up to 1907. I will list them in the order of discovery:

rare earth	*metal*	*year discovered*	*discoverer*
yttria	yttrium	1794	Gadolin
ceria	cerium	1803	Klaproth
lanthana	lanthanum	1839	Mosander
didymia	didymium	1841	Mosander
erbia	erbium	1843	Mosander
terbia	terbium	1843	Mosander
ytterbia	ytterbium	1878	Marignac
scandia	scandium	1879	Nilson
holmia	holmium	1879	Cleve
thulia	thulium	1879	Cleve
samaria	samarium	1879	Lecoq de Boisbaudran
gadolinia	gadolinium	1880	Marignac
praseodymia	praseodymium	1885	Welsbach
neodymia	neodymium	1885	Welsbach
dysprosia	dysprosium	1886	Lecoq de Boisbaudran
europia	europium	1901	Demarçay
lutetia	lutetium	1907	Urbain

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Seventeen rare earths were discovered. To be sure, didymium disappeared from the list, but that still leaves sixteen.

Sixteen elements that formed a tight family, very similar in chemical properties, impossible to separate completely by nineteenth century techniques! Chemists still hadn't the faintest idea how many more might be found and they were a major embarrassment.

Mendeléev's periodic table was inadequate to help in this respect. Three of the rare-earth elements—scandium, yttrium, and lanthanum—could be placed; the rest had nowhere to go.

But if the rare earths were a pain in the neck, it is just such pains in the neck that grease the wheels of scientific progress. If the periodic table was to be satisfactory, it would *have* to account for the rare-earth elements, and that meant something more fundamental than anything the nineteenth century had thought of would have to be added to it.

Fortunately, the necessary something was found, and to explain what that was, I'll begin by going into the matter of the periodic table next month.

Coming next month

The Fatal Fulfillment

a complete short novel by

POUL ANDERSON

(Watch for the March issue, on sale January 29)

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Here's another strong and convincing story from Charles Runyon (SWEET HELEN, September 1969). It concerns one man in a lonely sentinel-ship, and what happens when he is exposed to an enemy hypnotic attack so effective that its illusions push to the edge of reality.

DREAM PATROL

by Charles W. Runyon

HARUL STOPPED WHIMPERING as I strapped him into the padded capsule. For one instant his eyes lost their glaze of terror, his lose lips firmed up. "Marsh, where did I lose it? How do I pick up the thread?"

"They'll tell you back at the base, old buddy. They'll put you back on the track." I swung the lid down over my ex-shipmate. "Be good, old buddy."

I set the clamps and watched the sealant ooze out and harden around the seams. Through the inspection port I saw Harul's eyes roll up under his brows; his mouth opened so wide I could see down the moist pink tunnel of his throat, but his scream was contained within the cylinder. I pressed a button which released a sedative gas into the capsule and watched his face collapse like a punctured basketball. I started the freezing circuit, stepped out of the airlock bubble, and spun the wheel on the hatch.

I pressed my thumb to the EJECT switch, and felt only an anticlimactic tremor as the capsule fired. A spear of light arrowed into the blackness of space, became a pinpoint, then winked out.

I was alone, four hundred million miles from the nearest flesh-and-blood human being, trapped in my own untenable reality. The woman was lounging on a sofa covered with green plush, wearing a loose burgundy gown. Her vivid flesh tones made the duroplast interior of my sentinel ship seem as gray and abstract as a black-and-white photograph.

She closed her eyes and drew

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on a long cigarette, expelling a circlet of green smoke from her orange lips. "What now, soldier? Are you going to waste your life in this chunk of metal while the civilians back home take your jobs and your girls?"

I turned my back and dialed my supper, deliberately filling my mind with thoughts of medium-rare steak, mushroom gravy, mashed potatoes and red wine. It was all reconstituted from the same gray gruel in the nutrient tank, but it looked, tasted and smelled like the real thing. At least it did to me. I'd been in the service since I was twelve, and had forgotten the taste of natural food.

She watched over my shoulder as I ladled psuedo-gravy over my psuedo-potatoes. I caught the subtle witch hazel fragrance of her perfume and began telling myself what I'd told Harul when she'd first appeared in our sentinel ship two weeks before.

"She's not real. She's a projection, a piece of Fen propaganda and nothing more."

I picked up my tray and turned, but she was standing between me and the fold-down table. She wore the uniform of a waitress in the Central Base Officers' Club: short blue skirt and blouse of silvery fabric, with a cleavage plunging down to the rose-ivory cup of her navel. She looked like a girl I'd tried unsuccessfully to date during my last furlough.

I considered walking around her, but my dignity recoiled from the picture of a six-foot-two-inch, twice-decorated space force lieutenant playing step-on-a-crack in the solitude of a sentinel ship. I drew a deep breath and walked toward her, gazing into her large, gray-green eyes. She seemed to draw herself up into a defiant posture, and I wondered what it would do to my mind if I walked, splat! into those two pneumatic protuberances she wore so tantalizingly high on her chest. My head ached from the strain of subconscious combat. It was my will against . . . what? I didn't know.

When I was two steps away, she began to shimmer. I felt a sense of space being stretched painfully in all directions. Abruptly the whole universe shifted imperceptibly to the left, and the girl disappeared.

As I ate, I reflected that I was playing a dangerous game. If she'd refused to move, I'd have been forced to accept her as an objective reality. Harul had gone over the edge the night I found him caressing his pillow and crooning his wife's name. She'd been killed three years ago in the Fen raid on Solem. His little girl had been captured and put in a Fen fattening compound. Harul might have endured the thought

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of his child being the main course at a banquet attended by slaty, ten-foot arthropods, but when she climbed on his knee and asked to be trotted . . .

"I couldn't take it either," I said aloud, gazing at a black splash on the far bulkhead where Harul had tried to disperse his torturing visions with a blaster. If he'd taken time to set the weapon for a narrow beam, he'd have holed the ship and killed us both. I'd jettisoned all weapons after that incident. Knives, scissors and all pointed instruments had followed when Harul tried to slash his own throat with a ceremonial dagger. When he tried to hang himself with his own coveralls, I'd resolved never to sleep unless Harul was thoroughly sedated. Last night I'd awakened to find him at the controls, turning the ship toward Zone N. It's a ten-light-year strip of seared planets and empty space which constitutes no man's land, or no Fen's land, depending on which side you're on. All ships entering the zone are given the same treatment a mouse would get if he tried to tiptoe through a room full of hungry cats.

I'd had no alternative then but to send Harul back to base. Now I realized that taking care of him had been the major factor keeping me sane. I gathered up the cups and plates and fed them into the converter, where they'd be broken down into atoms and reconstituted at some future date as plates, food, clothing or anything else my quartermaster unit was programmed to synthesize. I dialed coffee and a cigarette and sat down at the table smoking, gazing with an impacted sourness at the twenty-foot hemisphere which composed my entire habitable universe.

Nothing could have been less stimulating to the human eye. All instruments, bunks, sanitary facilities and communications equipment were folded into the walls and concealed by smooth duroplast paneling. The panels were luminescent, giving the effect of being inside a transparent membrane enveloped by a vast incandescence. As in prison, the light was never off. The viewports were round inkwells set into the membrane, and did nothing to alleviate my growing illusion that I was an unhatched embryo in a gigantic egg.

Suddenly she was sitting across from me, her chin resting on her laced fingers. "Couldn't we have a candle?"

A candle appeared between us, shedding its soft glow on her lovely face. A small button nose made her eyes seem even larger than they actually were. I noticed that her upper front incisors were prominent in an interesting sort of way.

"And music?"

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Violins wailed in the background. She rose and swayed, her shining walnut hair moving on her shoulders like a rich, heavy fabric. "Shall we dance?"

I threw my coffee cup into her smiling face. Her configuration winked out like a soap bubble, while the cup continued its arcing trajectory to the far bulkhead and shattered into mealy fragments. As I swept up the mess, I wondered what I'd have done if the cup had bounded off her nose. It was another of those mind-traps I kept setting for myself. It was wiser to take no notice of her.

A minute later she appeared on my bunk, lying on a bright orange bedspread and cuddling a pale mustard pillow. A golden tan covered her nude body and conveyed a hint of pale chocolate to the tips of her breasts.

I turned my back and dialed another cup of coffee, neglecting the preliminary step of first acquiring a cup. The scalding liquid spewed over my thumb and fingers. I did a dancing pirouette, clutching my hand against my stomach. The girl appeared in the control chair wearing a pair of transparent harem pants and a smile of quiet amusement.

"Know something, darling? You'll be sucking your own toes before they get around to sending a replacement."

I framed a supercilious reply to the effect that Egbert Yancy Marsh possessed mental resources beyond her feeble comprehension, then I realized she was probably right. I pulled out the code-sender and punched out an A-7 priority, aware that I was leaving myself open for a reprimand. The only messages which rated A-class priorities were those involving imminent physical death, invasion, or capture of a Fen ship.

The clearance light flashed, and I tapped out the message: *Under intense hypno-attack. Request immediate relief.*

A half-hour passed while I sat staring at the blank message-screen. I could hear her moving about the ship, but I refused to look at her. Then the glowing letters danced across the screen: *Contact medical secretariat, subheading psychiatric unit, priority P-2.*

I cursed silently at the priority rating. It meant that I had to use the subspace etheric voice transmitter, which would have been like someone five hundred years ago using Pony Express when he had a telephone on his desk.

I took down the microphone and drew a deep breath. "This is Marsh two-three-five-two-nine-seven, Sentinel. A forty-seven. Attention medical secretariat, subheading psychiatric unit, subject intensified hypnotic warfare."

I paused to catch my breath

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while the machine hummed, waiting for my next words to activate the tape. As soon as the entire message was recorded, it would be condensed into a shrill blip! and flashed to base. It would be retarded, transcribed on coded tape, monitored and sent to the department concerned. From there it would be carried from one desk to another until it reached someone who couldn't pass it on. The process sometimes took several days.

I cleared my throat. "Okay, whoever you are, you must be an expert on this subject. I had to send my shipmate back, and I need a new one, quick. I'm alone on the edge of Zone N, and there's a girl here who'd like nothing better than to see me run for it." I became aware of her long fingernails tapping the communications console. "She looks like a waitress I met in the officers' club lounge at base. I'm wondering if the Fens haven't found a way of actually projecting images into our ships. If this girl has been captured, that would account for it, and for the fact that my shipmate kept seeing his wife and kid. Her name is . . ."

She leaned down and whispered in my ear. "Rose, darling. Rose Marie, and I love you." She unbuttoned her blouse and slid her hand under the shoulder strap. I closed my eyes.

"Her name is Rose Marie, and she's getting realer by the hour. Give it the emergency treatment. Marsh two-three-five-two-nine-seven, out."

I pressed the SEND button, then went to the monitor screens and checked out each one of my forty traps. Their detectors swept ten million miles in all directions thirty times each second. If they encountered anything, they clamped it in a stasis field and flashed a signal to my ship. Sometimes the Fens jammed the signals, so I had to check the traps visually once a day. I hoped I'd caught a drone bomb, which would mean going out and detonating it personally. A Fen scout would've been even better. I could've spent a full day freezing, tagging and sending it back to base.

Today all traps were empty, fueled, and working perfectly.

I got out the chess board and set up a problem. A delicate white hand slid over my shoulder and moved the white bishop into a position flanking the black knight. It was exactly the move I'd decided on. Well, why not let her—?

I came to my senses and raked all the chessmen onto the floor.

I hooked up a 3-D projector and settled back to watch a pastoral adventure which had been filmed on my home planet,

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Zporan, before it was concreted over as a staging area for the third invasion fleet. I watched the jewel-like figures cavort inside the box until the heroine was captured by a mava-beast. Peering from the slimy reptilian coils was a familiar face framed in walnut hair. I hit the turn-off switch, dropped a sleep-tab, and stretched out on my bunk.

I dreamed she visited me during my sleep. I awoke with the vague mingling of guilt and secret glee which always follows a night of wild debauchery. A long, walnut-brown hair lay on my pillow. I reached out to touch it and the hair disappeared—but not before my senses registered a distinct impression of solidity.

At breakfast she sat across from me reading the paper while I spooned up my reconstituted oatmeal. I felt guilty for not offering her at least a piece of toast. I tried to build a mental wall against her presence, but she kept rustling the paper.

"It's going to be a long war," she said conversationally. "Imagine me in three thousand other sentinel ships, not to mention the big attack fleets. Can a man fight when a beautiful woman keeps popping up in front of his gun?"

At that point the S-set buzzed. I leaped for the switch like a drowning man grabbing a rope, then had to stand tugging my earlobe while the tape oozed out of the retarder. I hooked it to the speaker, and a deep, well-modulated voice began speaking with a false camaraderie which puckered my nerves.

"Hi, Marsh, this is Basil Underhof, psych unit. Sorry to report there'll be a delay in getting you a new shipmate. All available men are trying to stem the Sector Q breakthrough. As far as this new hypnotic gimmick is concerned, it heightens your suggestibility to a fantastic degree but projects no actual image. You supply the image yourself. Whatever it says or does represents your own thoughts, although there seems to be a strong push toward fantasies of a suicidal nature. Captain Yakov chewed halfway through his right wrist under the impression that his arm was a python trying to strangle him, so consider yourself lucky you drew a girl. I visited her in the club, by the way. She doesn't remember you, but sends regards. All the advice I can offer is to remember that your tour's up in six months, think happy thoughts and examine any unusual event closely. Our research boys are digging into this thing, and I'll let you know what they turn up. Underhof, four-seven-six-nine-two, out."

The tape went flappety-flap and whirred to a stop. The girl leaned against the bulkhead and smiled. "I wonder what Underhof would do if you flew back to base

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and dropped a bomb on the psych unit?"

My thoughts, I said to myself. Damn right they were my thoughts. I jerked down the microphone and growled, "Listen, Underhof, six months may seem like nothing to a base commando, but six more days with this witch, and I'll bite my own jugular vein in two. I need help and I need it quick. How do I turn her off?"

After I sent the message, I checked out my traps again, hoping I'd snagged at least a meteorite. I'd have had to check it out personally, because you never knew what kind of camouflage the Fens would dream up.

Each of my forty monitors gave me the same black stare.

I decided to start a journal, recalling the happy days of my youth. It went fine for a couple of hours, then I noticed that she was standing on the ceiling. Both her hair and skirt hung toward her feet in total defiance of the ship's artificial gravity.

"Did you ever stop to consider," she said, "that *you* might be the illusion, and *I* might be real?"

It seemed only fair to consider her side of the question. I pondered it for about thirty seconds before I realized it was a shortcut to madness. I swallowed a double sleeping potion and went to bed. She woke me up to ask for a drink of water, and I was standing at the spigot before I realized that I was the one who was thirsty. I drank the water and went back to bed.

The next day she didn't talk at all, and my nerves coiled up like springs. She leered at me when I used the sanitary facilities, pursed her lips in sympathy when I bumped my shin, wrinkled her nose as she read my jottings in the journal.

That night I woke up to find her soft form stretched out beside me. I felt the warmth of her body, and smelled the hot, sugary sweetness of her sweat. I cast back into my dream and remembered making love to her. Desire was still with me, and I told myself the game was up anyway since I could feel and smell her, so why not just finish what I'd started?

With a howl of dismay I leaped out of bed. I spent the next five hours playing solitaire, but I had to quit when she started turning the cards face up. I returned to my old stand-by, the journal, and fell asleep with my head resting on the open pages.

During the next two days she never left the front rank of my consciousness. She developed a technique of ignoring my presence, while manifesting her own in a dozen subtle ways. She must have taken twenty showers. She'd sit before a mirror arranging her hair, combing it out, and then rearranging it in a different style. She'd riffle through the pages of

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books, reading from back to front. She had a habit of humming tunelessly and tapping her foot at the same time, but to a totally different rhythm.

Finally I found myself sitting in the control chair, thinking how easy it would be to head the ship into the N-Zone and tie down the accelerator button. I heard her calm reasoning voice behind me:

"Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea. I've heard the Fens are offering amnesty and a planetary section to every trooper who comes across."

That was too much. I turned and hurled a cushion at her. Then I tore off the chair arm and charged her, swinging it over my head. She ran behind a potted palm which had somehow found its way into the spacecraft. I kicked it aside and saw her peering out from behind a hulking brute whom I recognized as my drill sergeant from basic training.

A still voice inside me said, *You've slipped over the edge, Marsh.* Another still voice said, *So what?* I plunged through the drill sergeant and seized her hair, but it turned to smoke and blew away. I saw her outside the spaceport looking in, wagging her fingers in her ears. I hammered on the port until the chair arm came apart, then I fell on the deck and hammered with my fist until my muscles froze into a leaden cramp.

The buzz of the S-set saved my sanity. I jumped up and turned it on.

"Underhof here, Marsh. Sorry I'm late. Took yesterday off to go skiing with your waitress. Well, down to business. Turning her off. Hmmm. Suppose you killed the hypnotic image, that is, acted out the girl's death in a convincing manner? I recall someone trying that. There was some unpleasant side effect, but I can't remember what it was. Of course, you have to accept her existence before you can believe in her death. Then you'd have to keep on believing you've killed her, otherwise she'll show up again. I doubt that it'll work, but it'll give you something to do. Keep your chin up, everybody here at headquarters is pulling hard for you boys in the field. This is Underhof, four-seven-six-nine-two, out."

Could I believe in her? I could, to the limit of my senses. A part of me would continue to doubt her reality, as it was always doubting reality itself, snickering secretly at my strident endeavors to prove my own existence.

That night she visited me in a sheer black nightie. I removed it gently from her warm body, twisted it into a tight spiral, and looped it around her neck. Her eyes bulged and her tongue lolled out. She grasped, "I'm real, please don't—!"

When she was dead I dismembered her with a knife I'd over-

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looked when I jettisoned all deadly weapons. Her blood ran all over the deck. My shoes made sticky adhesive sounds as I walked around, cutting the parts of her body up into little pieces. Then I cut the little pieces up into littler pieces, stacked the whole bloody mess in the airlock and flushed it into space.

Her remains floated around the ship for two days. Now and then a finger or a kidney would drift past the viewport. When I couldn't bear it any longer, I moved the ship. I thought of the last pathetic words she'd spoken, and I told myself:

"You murdered her, Marsh. She was only trying to keep you company, and you killed her. You're a dirty bastard."

I wished I'd kept a souvenir, a swatch of her dress, a lock of her hair, an eyeball. I was like a bereaved lover, listening for her footsteps, remembering the dimple in her cheek, the way her hips rotated while she brushed her teeth. I couldn't eat, I didn't sleep. I thought of Captain Yakov, and made an effort to gnaw through the artery in my wrist, but my teeth had been weakened by too many years of reconstituted food. I tried hanging from an overhead conduit and dropping on my head. I only bounced in the half-G gravity and got a muscle spasm in my neck which immobilized me for an hour. I discovered how hard it was to damage yourself in a ship padded for sudden course changes. There were no sharp corners or projecting buttons, all was rounded and resilient, even the dial covers were made of transparent plastic which crumbled instead of shattering. I tried getting a fish bone caught in my throat, but the reconstituted nutrient melted to paste.

The surest way of effecting my own demise remained the simplest. I opened the control panel, headed the ship into the lethal midnight of the N-Zone, and held my thumb above the accelerator button.

Ding! A bell announced the arrival of a capsule.

I watched it warm up in the airlock, sparkling with the condensation of space-frost. I waited, then went in. Through the inspection plate I saw the familiar face framed in walnut-brown hair. My mind shattered into a thousand fragments, each one containing its own incoherent thought:

She's real this time. No she isn't, you created her with your mind. *You conceited ass, you really believe you could create a seven-foot cylinder of duroplast crackling with cold and coruscating with brilliance, bearing the official seal of the space force?* Why not? It's no harder than believing that a waitress from the officers' club lounge would arrive in a freeze-capsule.

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I had reached the point of deciding to smash the face-plate and shoot her back into space when the shipping tag caught my eye:

CONTENTS: ONE FROZEN ENLISTED PERSON.

Rigomundo, R. M.
124921 Female
Rank: Cpl.
Assignment: Sentinel N-47

I felt a humble gratitude for the benevolent omniscience of the Space Secretariat. If Underhof had been present, I would have kissed him. I pressed the de-freeze button and waited. When the time was up, I lifted her from the capsule and carried her into the ship. I lay her on my bunk and savored the reality of her presence. Her hair had golden highlights I hadn't noticed before.

Her breath quickened as she approached consciousness. To make her comfortable, I removed her white freeze-suit. Beneath it she wore a blue one-piece tunic reaching to midthigh. Her right sleeve held her insignia of rank, and her left carried the sunburst emblem of the Space Secretariat. On her right breast pocket was embroidered: COMPANION.

She opened her eyes and looked at me. "I remember, you always ordered some weird drink."

I grinned. "Gatroxip. It's the native beer of my home planet."

"You asked me to go moon-sailing."

"And you quoted the regulation against fraternizing."

"XR-428-22-6389." She smiled and the dimples in her cheeks were deeper than I remembered.

I decided a cup of coffee would ease our relationship. As I opened the food-panel, I said, "I suppose that word on your pocket represents the psych department's answer to the hypno-war."

"Lieutenant, you are looking at a member of the first graduating class of the Galactic Space Force Corps of Companions." She swung her feet to the deck and walked over beside me. "That's my job, by the way." She took the cups from my hand and held them under the spigot. "You use cream or sugar?"

"Neither one." My face broke into another grin as I watched her carry the cups to the table. She was pleasantly shy and self-conscious, not one of those brisk, efficient women who make a man feel like a six-thumbed ape.

She sat down across from me and flicked the hair off her shoulders with the back of her hand. "I'll also need to know such things as how you like your eggs. Shirts with or without starch. There's no hurry. I'll be your companion for the remainder of your tour."

I wanted to jump up and dance, but I kept my voice casual. "Have you noticed we have no facilities for segregation of sexes as provided by regulation XR-428-22-6389?"

At that point I couldn't help

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breaking into a grin so lascivious that a bright pink flush climbed above the collar of her tunic. She took a folded paper from her pocket and held it out to me, her lips set in a taut line.

"I hope this doesn't spoil your fun."

The document revealed that the commanding general, on behalf of the Fleet Secretary, did ". . . hereby declare that a state of marriage exists between the following personnel, (Cpl) Rose Marie Rigomundo and (Lt) Egbert Marsh, til death do them part, unless otherwise specified. Specifications: None."

I folded the paper. Despite its tone of official fiat, the marriage produced an air of mystery, veiled shadows, and delights yet to be revealed. I saw that she was looking at me with concern.

"It's . . . standard procedure to make it effective only until the end of the tour, but . . . I insisted. I grew up in an old-fashioned family." Her chin jutted. "If you'll turn your back, I'll get ready for bed."

It would have been crude to refuse, since I was assured of a complete revelation eventually. I turned my face to the black ovoid of the viewport. It was not my plan to see her nude image reflected there, but I accepted it as a well-deserved fringe benefit of chivalry. I contemplated her muscular full-calved legs and wondered if they'd turn flabby during the enforced idleness of ship duty.

"I guess you'll miss your skiing," I said, watching the white veil of her nightdress drop over her head.

She frowned in my direction. "What makes you think I ski?"

Confused words filled my mouth like dry popcorn. "Why . . . ah, your legs, I guess."

She gave them a quick over-the-shoulder inspection. "These are waitress legs. I don't ski."

"But . . . Underhof said he took you skiing!" I turned, hearing the echo of my voice as though I were alone in the room. I seemed to be standing on a taut membrane which shimmered and trembled beneath my feet.

"Underhof?" She frowned. "Who's he?"

"He's . . ." I had to lick my dry lips. "He's in the psych department. You went skiing with him."

She walked over and slid her arms around my neck. "He just said that to impress you. I never dated those psychs. They're too conceited."

I'd forgotten how soft women are, how perfectly adapted to men. I pressed my lips to her warm neck and thought of the test I'd performed on the other girl. It was a test I couldn't win. If Rose Marie failed, she'd be gone. If she passed the test, she'd also be gone, and in a gory, gruesome manner.

"You . . . you're not a fantasy?" I begged to be convinced.

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"Darling, if I were fantasy, would we be standing here discussing it? Wouldn't we be doing what you want to do?"

It was flawless feminine logic, but I perceived the flaw. The brain which had created belief in one woman in order to dispose of her, could create belief in another in order to get her back. And if my belief required the support of freeze-capsules, uniforms, and official marriage orders, then those items would be included in my belief.

I began to realize what Underhof meant about unpleasant side effects. Disbelief in reality was no different than belief in illusion; my thoughts spun in Hamlet-like circles until, with a shout of frustration, I picked her up and carried her to my bunk, growling like a maddened mava-beast.

Next morning I lay musing on my pillow: "Sometimes you have to lose your mind in order to keep your sanity."

"What does that mean, darling?"

I pressed my nose into the musty veil of her hair. "What are we having for breakfast?"

"Flapjacks, syrup, scrambled eggs, smoked sausage, orange juice and coffee. How does that sound?"

"It sounds . . . exactly like the breakfast I had in mind." I laughed.

And laughed.

And—

Laughed?

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